

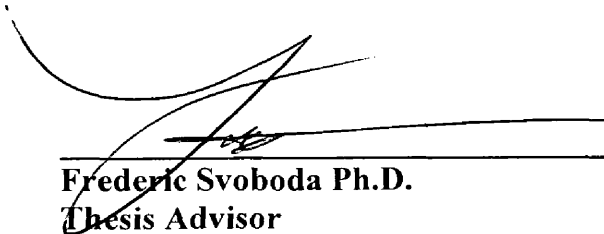
# **Cherry Valley and the Uses of Memory**

**An Honors Thesis  
Submitted as partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Liberal Studies**


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## **Introduction: The Uses of Memory**

One of the distinctions of historical maps dealing with the encounters occurring on the frontier between two separate cultures is a unique symbol to indicate massacres. The United States comprised, throughout its pre- and actual history, one great frontier that saw many such exchanges. Some of these were mortal, and many of them, one-sided in nature, tended to be called massacres by the losing side, in an attempt to salvage some moral high ground. However, no one disputes that what happened at Cherry Valley, New York, on 11 November 1778, was a massacre.

On that date, Iroquois and Loyalist Rangers raided the hamlet of Cherry Valley on the New York frontier, south of the Mohawk Valley. The raid destroyed the settlement and forced the evacuation of the fort. Forty people died, most of them unarmed civilians.

This minor episode seemed to give birth to a considerable body of work, comprising various histories from diverse viewpoints, and works of fiction including dramatic literature and motion pictures. The first question that arose from this material, in the course of preparing research for a historical paper was simple and factual:

1. Is it possible to find the truth of what happened that day?

Using only the primary and secondary source historical records, it seemed possible to arrive at a consensus of testimonies relating to what happened that day, and to report them. This was the sole question that mattered at the time. Other questions remained. In the course of trying to find facts, it was necessary to sort through material irrelevant to the task—historical fiction, fictional history, dramatizations. After the sorting, the mass of imaginative material seem larger than the factual, which led to the second question:

2. Why did such a relatively minor episode of the Revolution receive so much attention from creative artists with the passing of time?

The third question arose from the fact that nearly all of the imaginary material appeared in the popular culture no later than 1941.

3. Why is this episode now forgotten? Why does it rejoin the rest of the past, long lost to popular culture, to be remembered only by specialists?

In 1936, a popular author might allude to a person from this story and be confident that many might recognize it, and most others could find the reference quickly. The same name now might be recognized by a few specialists in early American history and no one else.

These are the specific questions that I raise, and hope to find their answers. They cannot be raised without acknowledging two other questions:

Why do we remember?

Why do we forget?

One way to judge a culture is by what it chooses to remember and to forget.

However we may want to believe that our culture is founded on traditions hallowed by the ages, what we have in fact is a fragile net of shared ideas. Those things that happened before our time are memories--not our own, but others', that we have thought about so long that they seem to be ours. Memory evokes such intense emotions that we forget that it is so unreliable.

We are not willing to believe that we forget; we pretend to choose what we remember. It feels better, stronger, to be the conscious agents of tradition, and that tradition a well-made edifice. If it is a false edifice, it is made so for a reason; we make our culture good or bad, and we can change it to serve our needs. That belief in a city on a hill is more comforting than a belief in a jerrybuilt shelter, assembled from scraps found in a casual search, atop a mound whose origin was a river snag that collected driftwood, debris and eroded soil for a century or so. The mystic chords of memory should not be written by



chance.

The memory of Cherry Valley, from 1778 to 1940, seems to indicate the latter model. The main reason that I chose it as a subject was its strong, definite narrative shape. On closer examination, it seemed to fragment into shards, picked up by various users and reassembled for other uses, until the final reassemblies resembled the original substance only by chance. For this reason, I shelved this topic and looked for something more definable, for a paper whose last page I could write first in complete confidence, whose meaning was clear from first to last.

I was persuaded otherwise. Not to find a meaning on first survey is not the same thing as saying that it has no meaning. Something happened, some people wrote about it in various ways for various reasons for a while and then people stopped writing about it. I am not sure why. I am sure of what they wrote, and that will have to do.

This study will take the form of a narrative history.

**Part One** begins with the event of November 11-12, 1778; what caused it, how it happened and what happened afterward. What I write will be the facts of the case as set down by various interested parties and witnesses, at the time and within living memory afterwards. When these facts lack contradiction from a source closer to the event and the time, I will assume that they are true for the purpose of a history. There is a school of history that holds that no such narrative can ever be honestly created and be factual, but that is not the purpose of this account. It contains the *matter* of the story, all the recorded facets of the main event, from which later narratives were created. These facets were options available to subsequent authors; what they chose to use or discard provides an insight into what they trying to do.

**Part Two** will look at the writing of the history, the natural tradition of the event and early uses of the matter for fiction. These historical writings, often described as naïve, consist of historical travel writing, family memoirs and local histories, written to draw attention to an honorable past and to create and preserve a historical tradition. They were written from the points of view of American patriots, Canadian loyalists and Iroquois exiles. Surprisingly, they rarely contradict each other when told in the first or second person; witnesses tend to be more accurate when talking about the things they've actually seen; distance from the event—the third or fourth re-telling of a story—seems to breed fervor and partisanship. Nearly all of these basic sources, many of which I use in the historical essay, were available by 1893, if not in print, on a library shelf in the United States or eastern Canada. All of the materials necessary to write an honest account of what happened at Cherry Valley were available.

Of course, artists are not obliged to confine themselves to the facts when they create historical fictions. Very few do. We may not use history or reality to judge their artistic vision, but we may use history to see which choices they made in the facts they report amid their artistic visions, just as we may judge differing reports of an event that we have witnessed. We can use history to see which filters were used to view events, or which contemporary biases were transported back into time to become anachronisms. It may not be true that all books are really about their authors, but most historical fictions are about the time of their writing, and not the time of their setting.

**Part Three** is the study of the those fictions; novels, some of them filmed; a history which belongs in this section; four films: one lost but famous, and two extant by the most esteemed directors in American film history, D.W. Griffith and John Ford. The fourth film, being made by less esteemed artists is almost predictably the finer work. Most of these works

tell us very little about the history they pretend to show, but their history and their ambitions cast a light on how the popular culture worked then.

It was after this point that the story of Cherry Valley seemed to fade from the popular culture, no longer the stuff of novels and movies, and its name and the names of its principal actors forgotten to all but antiquarians. **Part Four** is an attempt to summarize and synthesize the ideas introduced in the previous sections, and to decide what it means, if it means anything at all. It is a minor episode of history, as are its cultural aftershocks, and its minor lessons may be easily summarized.

## Methods

I plan to consider each work in its own context, exclusive of any other work, and then examine how it came to be and from what it was written---historical research, cultural imperatives of the time or pure imagination. I will then consider similar works as a body, either by author or by genre. One author influences others in his time, and one work can influence authors across a span of time.

Placing artistic works in cultural contexts will require judgments about those cultures. Griffith and Ford made their films about the Revolution based on best-selling novels. They also made their films, in 1924 and 1939, at a time when Great Britain was a recent or potential military ally, when blood was thicker than water. Is that why their “villains” were American Loyalists and Indians, rather than Britons? Walter D. Edmonds wrote about Americans at the end of their rope, struggling without the aid of an ineffectual Congress; he was writing of 1778 but he was writing in 1934. The producers of *The Patriot* found out just how strong Anglophilia is in the United States when they dared, in 2001, to have a British villain, and found themselves defending their choice.

People still live in Cherry Valley. A rising, progressive community throughout the nineteenth century, it expected to rise even more with the construction of a new state turnpike in the 1920's, but progress did not see fit to visit Cherry Valley. There is a museum and a tour map, and a librarian to tell you all about what happened that awful day that History came to Cherry Valley.

From Michigan, the closest way to Cherry Valley is through Ontario, not far from the lands granted to the Iroquois exiles after the Revolution. The largest town there is named Brantford, and Joseph Brant's memory sustains the community he established. Before that it passes through the hamlet of Delaware, where lies the honored grave of one of Walter Butler's Rangers. The direct route takes you through the Niagara Peninsula, settled by the veterans of Butler's Rangers, where a decent table wine is made in vineyards tended by the descendants of arsonists and terrorists. Some of them helped found the Shaw Festival, where you can see *Candida* performed not far from where Brant and Butler kept winter quarters, and where the redeemed captive Jane Campbell passed on her way home to Cherry Valley.

## Part One

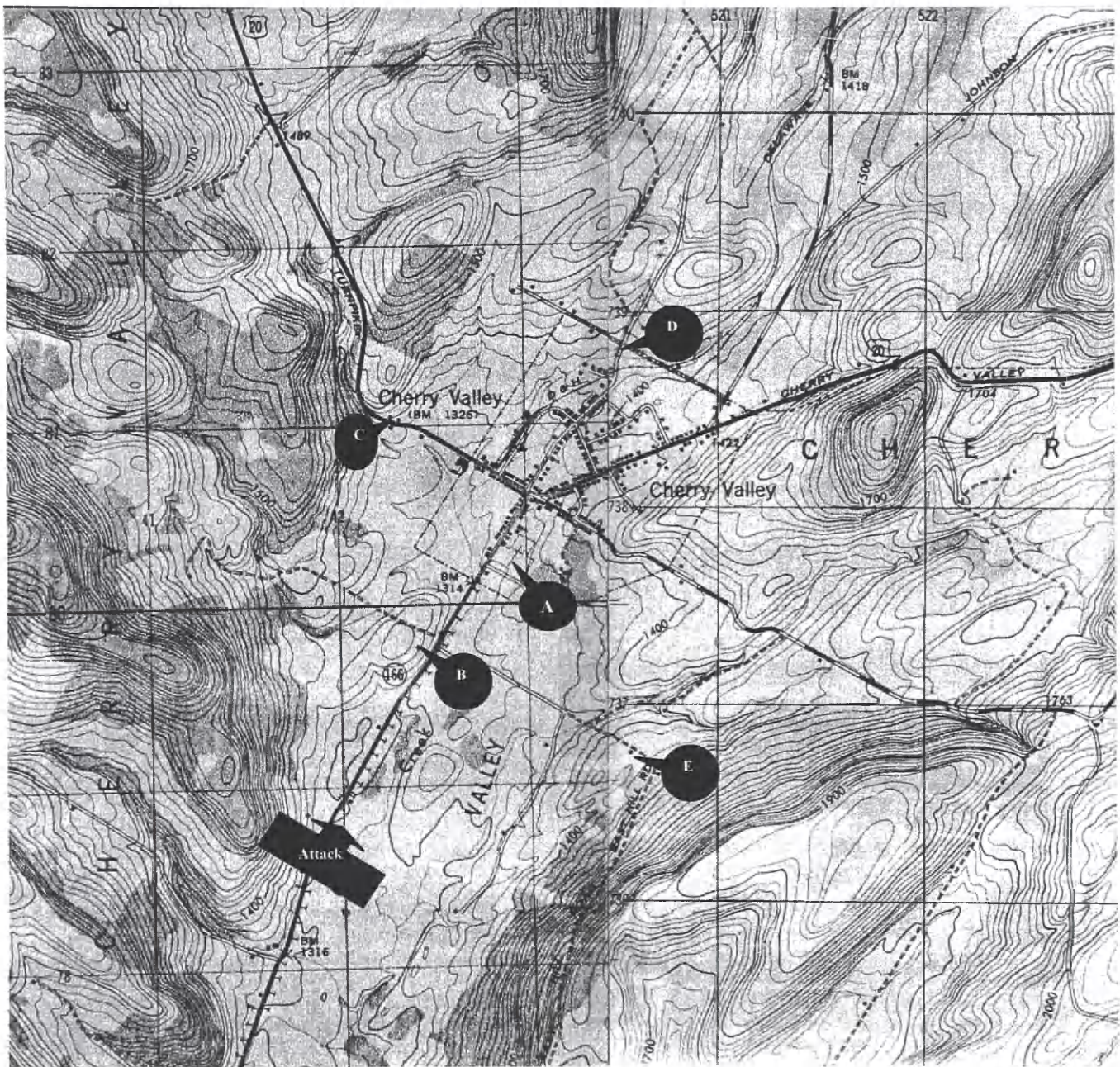
What follows is the revision of a paper written to satisfy a requirement of a course in American Revolutionary History. I was attracted to the idea of writing a narrative as well as a paper. I knew the outlines of the story and as I made some notes, a story seemed to take form—a frontier outpost, threatened and then relieved, believing themselves safe; an ambitious antihero leading a daring raid, not knowing until it is too late that he is out of his depth; a sudden, bloody catastrophe in the snow and a long afterstory.

It was during the research for that paper that I first encountered the “extraneous” matter that is the topic of the current paper. I also found another narrative; to write very long about men inflicting death makes one feel their emptiness, and I found myself turning with relief to write of Jane Campbell’s captivity. Her story seemed to underline the ultimate futility of the violent heroics of Butler and Brant. I found a deeper and more human resonance in the long passive heroism of her endurance.

What follows is a narrative, on a subject chosen for its dramatic, almost cinematic qualities. To me now parts of it seem almost like a treatment for a film, the visual aspects foremost and dramatic scenes interposed. Other parts, actual quotations that come down to us, I chose to highlight, again for their dramatic qualities. I do not think that I wrote anything that is untrue, but I’m sure that my purpose changed, at least in part, from satisfying a course requirement, to telling a story which had not been told before in its entirety. All of the elements used to create my retelling had been in print for more than 100 years, but as far as I can determine no one else has used them in this way. The first treatment that I examine will be my own.



The town today is not much larger than it was in 1778. The road up from the south is the old Iroquois trail. It meets two roads in town. That exiting to the northeast leads to Albany, fifty miles away, and the road that branches off it runs fourteen miles to Fort Plain in the Mohawk River Valley. To the northwest, the road runs over the hills to Andrustown, seventeen miles distant. Cherry Valley Creek divides in two southwest of town, and once created a marsh in which the raiders could make their approach to the fort. The site of Fort Alden is now the cemetery (A). An old house stands on the site of the Wells House (B). The home of the Reverend Samuel Dunlap was on the Andrustown Road (C). On the slope of Lady Hill, from which Brant is said to have watched the boys drill, is the home of Samuel and Jane Campbell (D). Allan Ginsburg's farm was on East Hill (E).



## Chapter One: History, 1738-1784

*The truth of what happened is the basis of all the works, factual and imaginative, that followed. That truth is based upon the subjective accounts of many witnesses and participants. It is possible to use that subjective testimony to create an objective narrative that describes the event accurately in all major and most minor points. Contradictions are few and understandable, and they arise not from malice but from filial respect and national piety. This narrative is necessary as the baseline, the control for all the accounts and uses that followed. All of these things happened and were written down and saved, but not all of them were used. That filter of usage is the beginning of culture.*

Cherry Valley, through which runs the creek of the same name, is about sixteen miles in length and varies in its breadth from one quarter of a mile to one mile. The valley runs from southwest to northeast and is bordered by high hills, the eastern hills being spurs of the Catskills. The valley ends three miles northeast of the village proper in Mount Independence, rising 1700 feet above the valley floor. Though the plain of the valley is not broad, yet the soil is fertile and conducive to all sorts of crops, as well as excellent pastureland.

By the standards of the frontier, it was an old town in an older place. The Mohawks called it Karightongegh, a name meaning *place of oaks*, and built a few lodges on the site, and hunted the area. In 1738 A Scotsman named Robert Lindesay, in partnership with three other men, obtained a patent for 8000 acres from the Province of New York. He settled his family on the site and built a farm and gave it the name of Lindesay's Bush. Two years afterwards he prevailed upon the Reverend Samuel Dunlop to settle nearby, and to invite several of his friends with their families to accompany him to the valley and likewise settle, in exchange for the grant of several hundred acres of land.

Campbells, Ramsays, Galts and Dicksons, recent immigrants from the north of

Ireland to the town of Londonderry, New Hampshire, came to Lindesay's Bush in 1741. With some other families, they settled in the valley, and seeing a natural orchard of wild cherry trees, gave the place the name of Cherry Valley. With their characteristic industry, they improved the place and encouraged others to settle there, but the isolation of the place slowed its natural development. By the onset of the Revolution, the settlement contained somewhat less than 300 souls, yet their attachment to the American cause was such that they were able to field a company of thirty-three rangers for service on the frontier under Captain Robert McKean.<sup>1</sup>

In the old days of the French Wars such a company might have been enough to keep the settlement safe from the odd straying party of raiders or deserters, for Cherry Valley lay south of the Iroquois lands and within its traditional hunting grounds. Raiders from New France would have to pass through the homeland of the largest and most feared confederation of Indians in North America to reach the village, or take a very long approach march across lands in the Iroquois sphere of influence. Should the Iroquois stay neutral in a war between France and Britain and their colonies, the slim chance of a raid on Cherry Valley would be even lessened — no power would risk provoking the Iroquois out of neutrality for the sake of a raid on so small a target. Acknowledged or not, this may have been a factor in the founding of the settlement, that it lay so far in the lee of a traditional ally as to protect it from the French.

However, the present war was not against the French. The Patriots hoped for Iroquois neutrality but they did not neglect to plan for its absence. They addressed these words to the Tryon County Committee of Public Safety:

...in case an Indian war should break out . . . to have a party of men stationed here among us . . . to keep a sharp look-out, and to scout around all of our frontiers; lest at any time we be taken by surprise . . . if Capt. McKean and his



company be removed from this place, that they would be pleased to send some others in his stead; that we might not lie altogether naked and exposed to the assaults of the enemy.<sup>2</sup>

That was June 3rd. Their second request a month later was more successful, bringing a second company of rangers. There was also a home guard of local men, exempt from militia duty because of their duties or because of age—sixty years—whose military effectiveness could be imagined. So ended the struggle in 1776.<sup>3</sup>

The summer of 1777, a stockade was prepared. Col. Campbell's house, the largest in the settlement and built on high ground, was chosen; the house and two large barns surrounded by a palisaded earthwork, and two blockhouses built within. Martial law was proclaimed, and no one came into or left the village without permission.<sup>4</sup>

Any hopes that the divided Iroquois would maintain neutrality in the war were ended at Oriskany, where Iroquois warriors fought Patriot militia from the Mohawk Valley settlements. Each side suffered losses that would cripple them for the rest of the war. Not the least crippling legacy of the battle was the bitterness of loss and the need of revenge. Lt. Col. Samuel Campbell and Maj. Samuel Clyde were the only men from Cherry Valley to partake in the battle. They served in Ebenezer Cox's regiment of Mohawk Valley militia, and stepped in to take command of the survivors after Cox's death. Oriskany was fifty miles from Cherry Valley—three day's march for good soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

Added to that was the fact that the main route from Unadilla and Onoquaga, the southernmost towns of the Iroquois, north to the Mohawk lay directly through Cherry Valley. Had Cherry Valley been no more than an isolated settlement, it would have been left to its fate, with strong advice to evacuate. However, its place on the southern flank of the Mohawk salient made it both an outpost in case of attack and a point from which to prepare offensive action against the Iroquois. Such may not have been the case made by Col.

Campbell and Capt. James Wilson—no man likes to think of his home as a point to be sacrificed in the defense of more important posts—when they met with Lafayette at Johnstown in early 1778, during the General's tour of the Northern department. When they left it was with his orders that a fort be built in Cherry Valley.<sup>6</sup>

The daily routine at this time was that all persons nonessential to farm work were quartered in the village, and farm workers went out in armed groups to tend the crops. It was the habit of the boys to meet in the common with their wooden guns and imitate their elders in military drill. They were doing this one morning in late May. A small group of men, watching from a hill about a mile east, saw them through the trees. Their leader remarked that Colonel Campbell's house was well guarded. The plan had been to make an attack that night and bring off some prisoners, but the sight of the garrison and its evolutions changed the plan. The village was left in peace.<sup>7</sup>

The leader of the scouting party was a Mohawk warrior named Theyendanegea. His Christian name was Joseph Brant. He and his men moved on, opening the raiding season at Cobleskill, sixteen miles southeast of Cherry Valley on May 30. They lay waste to the settlement, burning ten farms and killing all the livestock that could not be carried off. Twenty-three men were killed, including eight soldiers in a running fight between Brant's raiders and a party of militia and continentals. The regulars were a detached company of the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment. Brant returned to Unadilla by way of Cherry Valley. A few miles outside of town, his men caught two couriers, killing one. The survivor, Peter Sitz, managed to destroy a dispatch containing a list of the very great wants of the outpost. Instead, he gave up an innocuous round-robin dispatch. Brant and his three hundred raiders moved on. The campaign of 1778 had begun on the frontier.<sup>8</sup>

By now, refugees were streaming into Cherry Valley, the last safe place south of the

Mohawk Valley settlements. Many came from Unadilla, an old Iroquois town resettled by Americans, now abandoned because it was so close to the Iroquois castle of Onoquaga.

The townsmen knew that a fort was to be built to replace the barricaded house of Col. Campbell, but could do little other than survey the ground of a likely site. All the able-bodied men and boys stood guard over the farm workers or the town, or responded to alarms: strangers seen after nightfall or watching from the hills. Soon enough the genuine alarms came; 120 miles to the south, 800 Iroquois and Tory raiders on the Susquehanna destroyed the Wyoming Valley settlements; raiders in such numbers as had never been seen in the French wars, and casualty lists to rival Oriskany. The real story was terrible enough, but every passing rider or refugee did their own bit of embellishment, and the geography was known to all. From Tioga the raiders traveled down the East Branch of the Susquehanna to Wyoming. Had they taken the West Branch instead, they would have reached Cherry Valley at almost the same time.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after that, Brant's men raided Andrustown and Springfield, nine miles apart, in the same day, killing eight men and taking another fourteen prisoners, as well as burning every farm in the neighborhood and making off with all movable livestock. They told the people they left behind to take themselves to German Flats, on the Mohawk, fourteen miles distant; those who did found their way marked by burning farmhouses to within four miles of the settlements. They needed no riders to bring the news of Springfield to Cherry Valley; the fires and the smoke were only eight miles away.<sup>10</sup> Six days later, July 24, the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment had come to defend the valley. One of the officers noted the warm reception in his diary:

Arrived at 4 p.m. The regiment was received with much joy, with firing a blunderbuss and one round from the militia and inhabitants, which were posted at Cherry Valley''.

The Seventh had been raised in Boston in early 1777 from companies throughout Massachusetts, including men from the old Maine province. They first served in the Northern department. From there they were transferred to the Highlands Department and joined John Nixon's 1st Massachusetts Brigade in time to meet Burgoyne at Bemis Heights. Now they were back in the Northern Department, owners of the immortal battle honor of Saratoga.<sup>12</sup>

Yet while they manned the entrenchment at Bemis Heights, other regiments from Nixon's Brigade had gone forth, led by Arnold, and driven the British regulars from the field.<sup>13</sup> There is nothing to say that they were lesser soldiers than the rest of Nixon's men; they may only have been farthest down the line when the call came up for more men. Since April they had served on the frontier, mainly in detachments, doing things that the militia could not be counted on to do, and dying by one's and two's in the woods. Now, at last, the regiment had been reunited, about 250 men, well under their authorized strength, at the very limit of civilization.<sup>14</sup>

The soldiers went to work improving the stockaded church, quartering themselves in Col. Campbell's palisaded house. The officers boarded with families not far from the fort-to-be, already called Fort Alden, in honor of the 7th's Colonel, Ichabod Alden. Col. Alden made his own home and headquarters in the home of Judge Robert Wells, one of the pioneers of the valley, and a man so esteemed by his neighbors that they agreed to ignore his passive Loyalism, and to protect him from the excessive zeal of the Associations and Committees of Tryon County. In return, he remained in Cherry Valley with his family, among his old friends, waiting out the war.

If Alden quartered himself in Robert Wells' house as punishment for his Tory leanings, the histories are silent; there is no other reason to think that he did so other than

the comfort of the house and its proximity to the new fort. The soldiers worked quickly and soon had the walls in place. On August 6, they moved from the stockade at Campbell's house to the fort and began work on the redoubt, the central earthwork. This was the main work now for the regulars; since their arrival in Cherry Valley, the enemy had faded into a rumor of shadows in the woods.<sup>15</sup>

The militia, heartened by the presence of regulars, finally answered the calls in larger numbers until 140—out of 417 men called out from the local regiments—were on duty in the valley by August 28. The militiamen relieved the regulars from some of their more bothersome duties, like confiscation and requisitioning. Some were too eager, and Albany rang with the complaints of the local farmers about the ardent manner in which livestock was being assembled--some of which never reached the troops it was meant to feed. The complaints predated Alden's arrival and were probably directed at the foreigners from German Flats.<sup>16</sup> The regulars settled into the life of the village, as Lt. McKendry noted:

...went to Rev. Mr. Dunlop's and drank sillabub with discoursing the old gentleman about sundries affairs....went to Colonel Campbell's and saw ye Dominie's bee wool breaking..

It was not all hard duty at Fort Alden. Lt. McKendry wrote of horse races and field days for the men and the citizens.<sup>17</sup> The war had seemed to ebb from this part of the frontier. With the coming and going of understrength militia companies and the work at the forts, Cherry Valley was a hive of activity, with more promised. Colonel Alden may have hinted at the offensive action being planned against the Iroquois for the new year; this year's campaigning being nearly done. Governor Clinton was urging such a military policy and had already begun to prepare.<sup>18</sup> Cherry Valley had been the last outpost left south of the Mohawk settlements; now it was to be the starting point for the offensive against the Iroquois towns on the Susquehanna.

In mid September, the half-quiet was at last broken. A force of 300 Loyalists commanded by Capt. William Caldwell and 150 Iroquois, prominent among them Joseph Brant, came north from Unadilla, along the line of settlements along Butternut Creek and west of Otsego Lake to attack German Flats. On the way they surprised a scouting party of four militiamen; one escaped. Adam Helmer counted until he numbered 200 raiders on the trail and then ran north to warn the settlements. The people sent for the militia, sheltered in the local stockades and fortified churches, and watched sixty-three houses and fifty-seven barns burned; 235 horses, 229 cattle and 269 sheep driven off. Only three men were killed. The militia and Alden's regiment came out after the raiders but as usual, a day's false start was enough to assure the safety of the Tories and Iroquois. It was not until afterwards that the route north to the west of Otsego Lake was discovered.<sup>19</sup>

There was never any doubt of their origin. Col. Thomas Hartley came up from Pennsylvania and burned the Seneca town of Tioga. Before he returned, he sent a letter to the Seneca accusing them of murdering women and children in Pennsylvania and threatened to destroy the Seneca lands. Two weeks after the raid Lt. Col. William Butler led his own Fourth Pennsylvania Continentals to attack Unadilla. He had the very able assistance of a detachment of Morgan's Riflemen and subsequently surprised the Indian towns around Unadilla on October 6, 1778. They destroyed every habitable building there and pushed south to the Iroquois town of Onoquaga three days later, repeating the destruction. No warriors were present—Brant was raiding far to the east on the Delaware when he learned that his base and all his supplies had been destroyed or carried off. William Butler returned to his camp at Schoharie, his trail passing through Cherry Valley, without any loss on October 16.<sup>20</sup>

It was now late in the campaign year. The temperature was dropping and days were

drawing short. The Americans could congratulate themselves on the vigor of their response and their killing blow against the Iroquois bases on the East Branch of the Susquehanna. In 1777, the successful defense of Fort Stanwix on the western border of the Mohawk Valley had closed that way to large-scale raids by the Iroquois. Now it must have seemed that William Butler's raid and Alden's fort at Cherry Valley might do the same for the southern border. Had not the Iroquois and Tories taken the long way around Otsego Lake to avoid the garrison at Cherry Valley? Had not the scouts been sufficient to save the farmers, if not the farms, at German Flats? How could the raids continue without a secure nearby base?

Many of the refugees who had left Cherry Valley in the spring and summer now returned with the intention of wintering in their homes. The militia went home and left a small party to winter with Alden's regiment at Cherry Valley. Alden was probably glad to see them leave; it being hard enough to keep his own men, under regular discipline, in order, much less the spectacularly undisciplined militia. When local citizens asked to store their most valuable property in the fort, he refused. His men had enough temptations to deal with. It was also hard to keep them fed. The supplies were always short, the men were always tempted to do a little supplementing on their own—a necessary evil but ultimately ruinous of discipline and good order. Alden's men were also low on ammunition, and when they were between shipments, had to borrow from the townsmen.<sup>21</sup>

Yet another warning came from one of the friendly Oneida:

...an Onodaga Indian arrived at their Castle, from one of the branches of the Susquehanna, called the Tioga. That he was present at a great meeting of Indians and tories at that place, and their result was, to attack Cherry Valley, and that young Butler was to lead the tories<sup>22</sup>.

Alden received this news November 7<sup>th</sup>. So did the townsmen. Afterwards all would remember how they asked Col. Alden to stay in the fort until the scare blew over or again at

least to shelter their valuable property, and how Col. Alden dismissed their fears as exaggerated. However ominous the warning would loom in hindsight, their fears at the time were of the Tories more than the Iroquois.

...there has been and still are, men yet remaining in our Neighborhood, and betwixt us and the Savages and their associates,....assisting our Enemies, with Rations and in plundering and robbing us of our Cattle, and secreting them, for the Enemies use; and Some of these Villains have been apprehended at ye Butternuts and Elsewhere on our Frontiers Since Col. Alden came amongst us & by his means, who has acted with great activity & prudence in Subduing these Rebels to the States;...they were sent to Albany to be secured from further harming us, and that they might be treated according to ye demerite of their Crimes; Now, by some means or other, these our Enemies, are set at liberty and tolerated to return with their passes to come again amongst us; now for God's Sake and for ye Sake of ye States, and ye sake of us who have & still are ready and willing to venture our lives and our all for the Common Good of ye states, Let Speedy methods be taken to apprehend and Carry off these Notorious Villains that are known to have been our Enemies, and still have some of their friends, Relations and associates with Brant & Butler's party...some of w'ch...it can be proven have aided Brant in his way of burning & Slaughter...and by whom we have still reason to fear receiving a stroke.....to prevent w'ch & to dissappoint our fears, O Genl., let a sufficient number of Troops be allowed us, & if possible those we now have under Col. Alden, as they now are acquaint with out country & the Roads & Haunts of our Enemies, so that by their means we may be screened from Slaughter & Devastation and this Quarter from Ruine & Distress &c.<sup>23</sup>

This was the pith of the appeal to General Edward Hand, newest commander of the Northern Department, presented to Hand in person during his tour of the new command. It was dated November 7th, 1778, and signed by the leading men of the valley. Their fear seems greater for the enemy within than for the raiders without; their complaint is not that they are badly defended but that traitors and untrustworthy men are allowed to run free and help Brant and Butler. They do not ask for more troops, only to keep their numbers steady and if possible, to keep Alden's regiment, because they know the country now. If there was some looming terror in the prospect for the valley, it does not appear in this letter. If Alden was an unfit officer, commanding cowards, it does not say so here.



It was the very end of the campaigning season. To raid now meant risking a long retreat march through unforgiving weather. Speed had always been the raider's ally, and a few hundred men could turn a forest track into a mire in this season. The campfires, which were an option in the summer, were necessary now, and any fire risked detection by forces that the Americans had demonstrated that they possessed. Against all that was the Oneida report. Alden sent out patrols, some with a dozen men, and waited.

The people in the valley were already preparing for the winter. The crop was out of the fields, the animals taking the last of the pasturage. There was work yet in the fields. There was always something else to do on a farm. Then the snow began to fall. Men who struggled out to the barn or an outbuilding might have wondered how anyone could walk a mile, much less come up from Unadilla in such a driving snowstorm. It may have been so that they were safe at last.

The face was a familiar one, but it brought Sgt. Hunter little comfort. About a year before, Adam Hunter had been a prisoner in Albany Jail, deemed suspect as a Loyalist. He shared his lodgings with others, some suspects, some confirmed. One of the confirmed men was to be hanged. His claim of coming into New York under a flag of truce was made questionable by his recruiting activities on his way to Albany, and his civilian dress made him a spy. In time, both men left the jail. Hunter swore loyalty to the American cause with enough conviction to make his jailers believe him, and joined the militia. The condemned man managed an escape.

Hunter led one of Alden's patrols south of Cherry Valley. They made camp and built a fire and Hunter placed sentries and arranged for their relief in the night. They all fell asleep and were awakened by strangers. Some struggled or ran, and died. The survivors looked for

mercy in the Iroquois and Tory faces that surrounded them. Adam Hunter saw his cellmate from the Albany jail.

Captain Walter Butler recognized Hunter and gave him a chance to save his life. Hunter told him everything he knew about Cherry Valley.<sup>24</sup>

Walter Butler, son of John Butler, who led the raid on Wyoming, and senior captain in his father's corps of rangers, was twenty-five years old. He commanded the force that was about to attack Cherry Valley. He led about 150 rangers and another fifty volunteers from the King's 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment, in which he held an Ensign's commission. With these men were about 320 Iroquois, nearly all Seneca, many of them veterans of Wyoming and the summer fighting.<sup>25</sup>

Butler's youth was not a problem. Border warfare was a young man's game. His father was fifty-three; after leading the Wyoming raid, he returned to Fort Niagara, pleading ill health, and rarely took the field again. Nor was it his courage; he had demonstrated that at Oriskany and by his willingness to go into enemy territory to raise recruits. There was no doubt of his precedence; his King's commission gave him unquestionable rank over every other officer holding Provincial rank, except for Capt. John McDonnell, seconded from the King's 84<sup>th</sup>, but John McDonnell was Butler's loyal friend. Capt. William Caldwell had served in the field throughout the summer, and went with Brant to German Flats, but Caldwell was a stranger from Philadelphia, an adventurer. Earlier that summer he ordered two deserters shot out of hand. He was authorized to do so by John Butler's standing order, but his men said that the two "deserters" were only going home to bring their families out of Patriot territory. He was an able man, but a stranger, and many of his men hated him.<sup>26</sup>

Butler's problem was that he did not know Indians. John Butler could lead them by a subtle blend of flattery, bribery and threats, but the old man had learned the blend over a

lifetime on the frontier. Walter Butler was brave and smart, and knew much of what his father knew and treated the Iroquois with all due respect, but without any deep knowledge of them. He seems never to have been able to hide the fact that he did not like them very much.<sup>27</sup>

Had he understood them better, he might have known that these were not the same men who had gone to Wyoming with his father. Still feeling the ache of their losses at Oriskany, they followed and obeyed John Butler because he promised them victory and plunder at little cost, and he delivered it. For this, they would humor his humanitarian wishes and let their prisoners live, and spare non-combatants. Then they saw those same prisoners, who had given their parole never to fight again, back in the field. Prominent among these being Col. Nathan Denison, who signed the articles of surrender in July and who raided Indian villages up the East Branch of the Susquehanna in September—just in time to coincide with William Butler’s raids on Unadilla and Onoquaga.

Hartley’s accusations of atrocities, true perhaps for isolated farmhouse raids but untrue for Wyoming (and vague enough to apply to both) angered them deeply. All white men being hard to tell apart, William Butler’s sharing the surname of Denison’s co-commander at Wyoming, Zebulon Butler, further embittered the Seneca, who had now resolved never again to “fight a man twice”—to take prisoners. Since the Americans had accused them of murdering their prisoners and non-combatants when they had not, the Seneca would teach them the difference —by example.

There was also anger among the Seneca about the destruction of Unadilla and Onoquaga. Unadilla had been an old Iroquois settlement that became a frontier settlement, but Onoquaga was an Iroquois “castle,” a center of Iroquois lodges. Until now the Iroquois homeland had been inviolate.<sup>28</sup>

The Iroquois had no military leaders in the manner of European warfare. Each warrior was his own captain in battle. One prominent man might persuade others to follow him to a certain place and to fight the people there. He might even suggest convincingly a useful strategy for the fight—he did not even have to be an Iroquois. At Wyoming John Butler had placed his Rangers at the end of a field bordered by woods to wait for the Wyoming militia. When the militia came out of their fort to take the bait, the Iroquois hidden in the woods caught them in a terrible crossfire and chased the routed militia back to the gates of their fort.

The wars fought on the American frontier literally pitted the dregs of Euro-American society against the elites of Indian society. The Iroquois warrior was Homeric in comparison to an ordinary Euro-American soldier or militiaman. That strength was their weakness. Four hundred militia had fallen at Oriskany, but at least as many more could be found to replace them. The forty Iroquois who died on the same field represented an irreplaceable segment of a generation of warriors. The Iroquois could fight, but they could not die, and any battle threatening a significant loss of warriors was broken off.

That was why the Rangers were there. As at Wyoming, they would be the shock troops of any assault, giving and taking sustained fire and casualties. The Iroquois were foot cavalry, to scout and to exploit any success, and to bring to the field a threat of unrestrainable violence against resistance. They could be persuaded against violence; their mercy could be negotiated by the very few white men they trusted, and by their own chiefs.

Those men now present among the Seneca were:

Cornplanter  
Half Town  
Little Beard  
Little Billy

Farmer's Brother  
Jack Berry  
Twenty Canoes  
Wundungohteh

Hiadeoni  
Conneuesut  
Hohnogwus  
Onoongadaka

If anyone might be said to be first among them, it was Cornplanter, Gayentwahga, one of the two leading war chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy, a post that was the exclusive right of the Seneca. The fact that his father was a white man was not a liability, since Iroquois base nearly all family ties on the maternal line. Like Walter Butler, he was twenty-five years old, and he was elected to his post. His fellow war chief, Sayenqueraghta, was seventy years old at the outbreak of war. The greatest warrior of the Iroquois and one of the wisest, he served in the field throughout the war; his sole concession to age was ride a horse on campaign. Such a man was Cornplanter's fellow.<sup>29</sup>

Joseph Brant had joined the raiders October 22, at Owego, with his own small following, a personal company of about ninety Loyalists who chose to soldier with Brant despite that fact that he could not pay them and was barely able to keep them fed and clothed, and a small group of Mohawks including William Johnson, Jacob Lewis and "Little" Aaron Hill (Kanonraron), all ranked as Captains in the Indian Department, as did Brant. (Ranks in the Indian Department were mainly civil distinctions for pay and not war ranks, but might be awarded to a particularly able agent or interpreter.) Butler insisted that Brant's Loyalists had no standing as volunteers under Brant, and that they must enlist in the Rangers or be arrested as deserters. Brant's volunteers took him at his word and left the camp, with Brant's approval. He would have followed but the Mohawks and some of the Seneca persuaded him to stay; he did, but as leader of the remnant of his own small following, no more than a dozen men.

The Seneca would be the first to claim that they owed Brant nothing more than courteous respect, but they closely noted Butler's arbitrary treatment of a veteran band of border warriors, and how he had lost their help for the upcoming fight. The warnings to the

frontier posts were of a raid by “Brant and Butler,” but in fact, neither man commanded the majority of the raiders on their way north to Cherry Valley.<sup>30</sup>

Other than a more accurate count of the numbers of soldiers in the village, the most important information Butler learned from Hunter was that the officers were still quartered outside of Fort Alden and that Alden’s headquarters was in the Wells house, 400 yards southwest of the fort on a low hill. He made plans at once for a party of fifty rangers and some Iroquois to attack the headquarters, to be commanded by John McDonnell, and to lead the rest of the Rangers and Volunteers, and as many Iroquois as would follow, to attack the fort. Once the garrison was defeated or at least neutralized, the settlement might be destroyed and plundered in relative safety.

It was a good plan and the Seneca agreed to it, but had Butler been a soldier for very long he might have known that few plans—and no plan for Indians—survived the first contact with the enemy.

They set out north for the valley at first light the next morning. It began to snow. Before long, they were marching through a driving snowstorm. They made fourteen miles before Butler called a halt and made a short camp in a pine wood. He told them that they would rest here, and after nightfall continue to Cherry Valley, six miles distant. There was enough of a moon to let them see their way and they would make a night attack. The Iroquois agreed.

The raiders were too close to light fires to dry themselves or to cook. They waited. The snow changed to heavy rain and the Iroquois decided that they had had enough that day, and told Butler that they would not attack that night, that morning was soon enough. The raiders covered their arms and powder as best they could, sheltered under the pines, and settled in for the night.

It was still raining in the morning. The raiders moved off their hill and started north. A dense swamp hid them until they were within a mile of the fort, but passage through the cold muck was slow, and it was nearly 11 o'clock before they began to emerge from the swamp and assume some sort of order for the assault. John McDonnell's force of Rangers and Seneca set off to attack the headquarters in the Wells house. Walter Butler led the larger force of Rangers and Seneca against the fort to the east of the Wells house.<sup>31</sup> In the stir of preparation, no one seemed to notice or mind that a small number of Seneca were making their own way into the settlement.

Two men were cutting wood on the edge of town when they saw some strangers coming up from the south. The woodcutters might have assumed that they were Alden's scouts, for they made no attempt to flee until one of them was shot. The other ran to the town.<sup>32</sup>

Nathaniel Hamill was riding into town from his farm several miles south down the valley. He was a mile off when he saw some Indians, who shot and wounded him. He was able to ride to Alden's headquarters and tell the Colonel what had happened. Alden was sure that it was a party of stragglers, but he called out his guard. Hamill rode on to the fort.<sup>33</sup>

Joseph Brant had already detached himself and his men from the raiders and went to town his own way, taking a short cut across the fields. He was going to warn his friends in Cherry Valley, chief of whom was the family of Robert Wells.<sup>34</sup>

Butler heard the shots and halted. He told his men to check their loads and reset their flints. From the Iroquois came a great cry and all set off at once to attack the town. Butler ordered his men forward instantly, about a hundred yards after the Iroquois, McDonnell leading his party to the Wells house, Butler with the rest to attack Fort Alden.<sup>35</sup>

At the Wells house, the guard called out by Alden saw rushing towards them more

Indians than they had ever seen in their lives. The squad prepared their muskets and fired into the mass. Three Seneca fell wounded. Then their brothers were upon the guard, and up into the house. These were from the band led by Little Beard, Sequidonque. They found more soldiers inside and killed them, and found others in the house—Robert Wells, his mother and his wife, his four children, his brother John and his sister Jane, and three servants—and killed them as well.

Jane Wells alone escaped the house. One of the Seneca found her hiding behind a woodpile, grabbed her arm, and dragged her out. She begged for mercy in what she knew of his language. Then Sgt. Peter Smith, of Butler's Rangers, a former servant of the Wells', came upon them and told the man to spare her, that this was his sister. The Seneca shook his tomahawk at Smith and then drove it into the head of Jane Wells.<sup>36</sup>

McDonnell and his Rangers came to the house in time to see the carnage and take prisoners of the survivors. Joseph Brant arrived about this time. The rough going over the plowed fields had been harder than he could have known, and he was too late to save any of his friends. He called his men to him and sent them out to try to save what friends he had left in Cherry Valley.<sup>37</sup>

Alden saw the slaughter of his guard and finally realized the seriousness of the attack. He grabbed a pistol, climbed out a window, and ran to the fort 400 yards down the hill. He looked back and saw he was chased by a single warrior, who called to him to surrender. Alden pointed the pistol back at him and snapped the lock but the pistol would not fire. Alden resumed his run and then tried to fire again but again the pistol failed; Alden ran on but by now, the warrior was close enough to throw his tomahawk. It killed Alden instantly and the warrior rushed up and took his scalp, just out of musket range of the fort.<sup>38</sup>

Butler reached Fort Alden too late. Major Whiting escaped from the Wells house,



reached the fort and closed the gate. The men in the fort had already begun to fire at the raiders, and Butler ordered a suppressing fire to keep their heads down. The Rangers and the men from the 8<sup>th</sup> surrounded the fort, firing fast enough to hide the fact that they were fewer than the men they were besieging.

Then McDonnell joined him with news of what had happened at the Wells house. Stopping only to set fire to an abandoned blockhouse, Butler assembled his men and retreated to a small hill overlooking the fort. He set his men to work, firing enough to keep the garrison from attempting to sally out. Once his men were set Butler pulled men out of the line and sent them into the town to do what could be done for the civilians.<sup>39</sup>

Hugh Mitchell was coming in from his fields when he saw strangers going towards his house. They saw him as well and some started after him. He saw that he could not reach the house in time and so ran into the woods, followed by some of the Indians a short way. He waited there for them to leave his house.<sup>40</sup>

Samuel Clyde, Lt. Col. of the Tryon County Militia, was in Fort Alden on duty. His wife was at home, alone with the children when the firing started. She gathered the children and fled into the woods. There she found that her ten-year-old daughter was not with them. Mrs. Clyde hoped that she gone to the fort instead, and hid herself and her children under a large fallen log.<sup>41</sup>

Lt. Henry Hare of the Rangers arrived at the Dunlap house and found Mrs. Dunlap and her daughter lying on the threshold. He picked up Miss Dunlap, and found that she was alive and unhurt; she had laid over her mother's body to keep it from being scalped. Little Aaron, Capt. Hill of Brant's men, came up and told Hare that he would guard Miss Dunlap and her father, Lt. McKendry's drinking partner, the old Reverend. Aaron brought him out of the house and protected the two while the house was plundered. An Iroquois snatched

the hat from the Reverend's head and Aaron chased down the thief and came back with the hat. He found the old man standing in the rain bare-headed, his wig having been stolen by another thief. Dr. Dunlap did not know yet the fate of his daughter, Mrs. Robert Wells.<sup>42</sup>

Hugh Mitchell returned carefully to his house. He saw it on fire and ran to find that his wife and four children lay dead outside. He put out the fire and found his daughter, a girl of ten, still alive. He picked her up and put her in the doorway when he saw more men coming to the house. Mitchell left his daughter and hid behind a long fence. From there he saw one of the party kill his daughter with a hatchet.<sup>43</sup>

Katherine Shankland was working at her spinning wheel when a strange man came into her house. He called her attention to the killings and burnings in the village; she replied that she had nothing to fear, as her family were King's people, Loyalists. He replied that being King's people had not kept the Wells family from being murdered. Mrs. Shankland then said that if Joseph Brant were with the Indians she and her family were safe.

"I am Joseph Brant" he replied, "But I have not the command, and I know not that I can save you, but I will do what is in my power."

A party of Seneca came near the house. Brant told Mrs. Shankland to get her children into bed and feign illness; then he went outside and told the Seneca that there was sickness in the house, and they left. He went back to Mrs. Shankland and put a mark of red paint on her and upon the five children, distinguishing them as his prisoners.

Brant left them, went out and gave a loud call. Nine Mohawks came running to the house. They butchered a hog and roasted it and went down to the larder and brought up bread and butter, and sat down to their meal.<sup>44</sup>

Some Iroquois came to the farm of William McClellan and prepared to burn the house and barn. He tried to stop them, telling them that he was in fact a King's man. "Then

we must burn them,” they replied, “or the Americans will know that you are loyal, and burn all of it themselves.” This they did. James Ramsay told the Iroquois who came to his house that he wished to leave with them and join the Rangers. “Then we must burn your property; they said, or the Americans will do it.” So they did<sup>45</sup>

For six hours, Butler’s men kept the garrison from leaving Fort Alden, partly by their vigorous fire on the stockade, and partly because the garrison was almost without powder and shot—only by appropriating the town’s supplies were the soldiers able to respond to the Rangers’ fire. Inside the fort, Major Whiting weighed the fire from the raiders outside, who did not seem to want for powder and ball, and compared them with his own. He recalled the fate of the Wyoming men, who left their fort to attack their raiders and were virtually wiped out. He considered that he had the only force of regulars south of the Mohawk, and kept his men inside, despite the pleas of the militia Colonels Campbell and Clyde. They had left their families when the signal gun was fired and ran to the fort. Now they looked out at the burning valley and wondered what had happened to their people.<sup>46</sup>

Night fell. It had continued to rain all day and it was raining still, but still the houses and barns burned, thirty-two houses and barns, two mills and the blacksmith shop. Between the fires and the moonlight there was light enough to see any sally from the fort, so Butler left his hill and the whole force camped about a mile south of town. A bonfire was built and the captives, between thirty and forty, placed around it, and the Rangers and volunteers around them, as Captain John Johnston of the Indian Department tried to bargain and cajole more of the American prisoners out of Seneca hands into his custody, at least for the night.

The captives looked around for missing faces. Families sat in groups, huddling together for warmth, wearing only what they wore when they fled. Jane Campbell, the

Colonel's wife, was here with her four children, the youngest eighteen months, and her aged mother. On the edge of the firelight lay a haze and beyond that were the fires of the Seneca, camped all around them.<sup>47</sup>

Brant and the Mohawks spent the night in the Shankland house. They took up the straw and feather beds, cut them open, emptied the contents onto the floor and lay down to sleep. Early the next morning Brant woke Mrs. Shankland and helped her dress the children. He took them out into the woods, eight-year-old Jane on his shoulders, young Robert Jr. in his arms. He hid them, gave them some Indian cornbread and told them to wait until the raiders were gone. He promised to free her husband and son, both prisoners.<sup>48</sup>

From there, Brant and his Mohawks joined Butler's camp. Walter Butler sent him with Captain McDonnell, sixty Rangers and fifty Seneca to complete the destruction of the valley's farms. Then Butler sent off the livestock, apparently using them to lure off most of the rest of the Seneca, together with the weakest of his own men. He sent scouts out to watch the fort and waited for McDonnell and Brant to finish their work. They returned with even more livestock, and, leaving no building standing in the Valley but Fort Alden, the last of the raiders left Cherry Valley.

They left behind them fifty-eight dead; thirty-two civilians, twenty-six soldiers. They carried off seventy-nine captives. Their only casualties were five wounded men: the three Seneca wounded at the Wells house, a private of the Rangers, and a Fifer-Major from the King's 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>49</sup>

When the raiders disappeared from sight down the valley, soldiers and townsmen came out of the fort to look for survivors. Lt. Col. Clyde went out and found his wife and children but not his missing daughter. When the Clyde's reached the fort, they saw the girl approach, but when the sentries came out to her, she saw the blankets they had wrapped

around themselves in the Iroquois style and thought they were Indians. She turned and fled back to the woods; the soldiers found her and brought her back to her mother and father.<sup>50</sup>

Outside the fort, the soldiers began to dig a grave for their own dead, but soon they made it larger for the dead of the town. The bodies of the Wells family were brought down from their home along with the guard who died defending it, and Ichabod Alden, who nearly escaped. All were laid together.<sup>51</sup>

Hugh Mitchell dragged a sled with the bodies of his family over the fields to the fort and the soldiers laid them in the grave. Those who escaped tried to remember who was positively dead and who was seen taken prisoner, and those simply missing. Before long, all the dead were found and gathered. There were still roving groups of Iroquois in the woods, so the survivors kept close and on their guard. Then a party was seen coming back up the valley, three dozen or so, and the soldiers went out to meet them, and then their families saw that they were the captives.<sup>52</sup>

Walter Butler waited until he was down the valley, and the Seneca far ahead, of him before he released more than half of his captives, nearly forty, most of them children, with a letter to General Schuyler:

I am induced by humanity to permit the persons whose names I send you herewith to remain, lest the inclemency of the season and their naked and helpless situation should prove fatal to them, and expect that you will release an equal number of our people in your hands, amongst whom I expect you will permit Mrs. Butler and family to come to Canada . . . I have done everything in my power to restrain the fury of the Indians from hurting women or children, or killing the prisoners who fell into our hands, and would have more effectually prevented them but they were so much incensed by the late destruction of their village of Onoquaga by your people, and shall always continue to act in that manner, as I look upon it beneath the character of a soldier to wage war upon women and children.<sup>53</sup>

Those hostages who remained fell into three classes: the willing, the useful and the unfortunate. James Ramsay and his four children, William McClellan and his two children,

were two of the Loyalists who escaped as “captives”. Six others listed as “Negro,” rather than as servants, may also have made their escapes at this time. The only women who remained were the wives of Col. Campbell and Justice of the Peace John Moore and Mrs. Cannon, Campbell’s mother-in-law; they and their children were kept to exchange for the families of Loyalists held hostage in Albany, such as Walter Butler’s mother and brothers. The soldier prisoners could be exchanged as well, for British and Loyalist troops taken prisoner.

Less fortunate were those taken by the Seneca to replace lost brothers and sons killed in action. The officers of the British Indian Department would go out that winter to the longhouses and bargain for their freedom, and most would be freed, but it would take months, if not years before they would return to their homes—if ever.<sup>54</sup>

The arithmetic was simple. It was twice as far to the Rangers’ base at Niagara as it was to the Seneca homelands. The captives were too valuable in exchange to risk on so long a march, so they would go with the Seneca, and spend the harshest part of the winter with them, until it was safe for women and children to travel. It was made plain to the Seneca how important were the lives of these people, and how well they would be rewarded for their safe return.

One day out, Jane Campbell’s mother, Mrs. Cannon, could go no farther, and was killed with a single blow from a tomahawk. The Seneca who killed her waved the hatchet at Mrs. Campbell and let her know that the same would be done to her if she hampered the march. She was carrying her eighteen-month-old son, but she kept up the pace. The next day an old man was given charge of her; for the rest of the journey he treated her with kindness. They walked nearly three weeks and 250 miles and ended at the great Seneca town of Kanadaseaga. There the families were split up and all the children were given away to other

clans to care for.

Jane Campbell, separated from her four children, went alone to live with a family, all women but for one old man too weak to fight or hunt. She made herself useful by making clothes for the family and their neighbors, who gave in return venison and corn. Thus, she gained some limited freedom in the town. When she told them how her people spent Sunday in prayer, they gave her those days to herself and told the children to be silent around her.

One day a man who came into the longhouse noticed her cap, and invited her to his own house, where he took down a woman's cap and gave it to her. She looked at it and her fingers found a cut in it, and bloodstains. He told her that he had gotten the cap in Cherry Valley, that he took it from a dead woman. She returned to the longhouse and carefully took off the lace and washed it, but the blood would not come out. She knew by the fine stitching of the lace that it was the cap of her friend Jane Wells.<sup>55</sup>

In Cherry Valley that winter only the soldiers remained. There were no farms left to mind and no livestock to tend, and nearly all of the survivors spent the winter in German Flats. There they were reduced to requesting relief from the state. Most other victims on the border could rely on kinsmen for assistance, but the people of Cherry Valley—"Europeans" so to speak, recent emigrants from the seaboard—only had fellow victims as relations. They could not obtain help from Congress, as had the people of German Flats, because that was on condition that they maintain a Fort, and the valley could barely erect a stockade. Governor George Clinton tried to find the money, and he tried even harder to find support for an invasion of Iroquois country to end the raids for good.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the winter letters passed through the lines seeking to arrange and exchange of hostages, the Campbells for the Butlers. Their husbands pressed their superiors for it and in the spring of 1779, an exchange was agreed to. Now it became necessary to

bring Mrs. Campbell and her children out of the Seneca country, not an easy thing. Though the arrangement was always meant to be temporary, the Seneca custom of adopting prisoners into bereft families had deep emotional resonance and it was hard for a family to give up someone they could not help but feel to be a kind of kin. John Butler himself had to go forth from Niagara to negotiate some of the captives' return.

An old chief, kinsman of the family that looked after Jane Campbell, came to plead for Butler and secured her release. He visited her before she left for Niagara.

You are now about to return to your home and friends, he said. I rejoice. You live a great way, many days journey from here. I am an old man, and do not know that I shall live to the end of this war. If I do, when this war is over, I will come and see you.<sup>57</sup>

About the time that Jane Campbell was on the trail to Niagara, others traveled in that direction. George Clinton's plan of an attack on the Iroquois homeland had come true, and two armies marched to meet at Tioga, muster point for last year's raids. From New York the governor's brother James Clinton came south through Cherry Valley, taking the garrison of Fort Alden with him. They followed the old raiding route to meet with John Sullivan's army up from Pennsylvania. The Sullivan Expedition (the Sullivan-*Clinton* expedition, to New York historians) marched into the Iroquois lands and fought the only battle of the expedition at Newtown, August 29, 1779. The Seventh Massachusetts was there, faced the Iroquois and Butler's Rangers again, and saw them beaten in their turn. The expedition reached Kanadaseaga, Jane Campbell's wintering place, about a week later and spent two days burning it.<sup>58</sup>

Earlier that summer, two Rangers were captured and court-martialed as spies by James Clinton at Canajoharie. Despite the pleas of their families, both men were sentenced to hang. Sgt. Gilbert Newberry was named by Hugh Mitchell as the man who had murdered



his daughter as she lie in the doorway of his house. There seem to have been no witnesses present to Henry Hare's rescue of the Dunlaps, and he was hung as well.<sup>59</sup>

On April 24, 1780, the raiders came back to Cherry Valley, seventy-nine Indians. They left nothing standing behind them, including the fort, and when they left, the townsmen left as well, and the valley was again a wilderness.<sup>60</sup>

The destruction of the Iroquois lands had sent hundreds of refugees to Niagara seeking food and shelter for the winter and with them came three of Jane Campbell's children. Only James, her seven-year-old son, was still among the Iroquois. He had been sent to live with the Caughnawaga Mohawks, who lived in Canada, far from Sullivan's march. After a year at Niagara, Jane Campbell and her three children went down to Montreal for another step in the exchange.

In Montreal, she met Mrs. John Butler and her children, the currency of her family's freedom. In that house Jane Campbell found a boy who had come to Montreal wearing Indian dress, and dressed by Mrs. Butler in some of her own son's clothing, the green coat of her husband's rangers. It was her son James. After eighteen months of captivity among the Mohawk he had forgotten how to speak English, so it was in Mohawk that James told his mother that he had not forgotten her.<sup>61</sup>

Two weeks after the massacre at Cherry Valley, Mr. J. H. Livingston of New York wrote to his brother to tell him the awful news. He included a story that he had heard.

...it is Said that when this party Came out, their orders were Read by young Butler, upon which Brant turned round & wept and then recovering himself told Butler he was going to make war against America but not to Murder and Butcher; that he was an Enemy from principle but he wod never have a hand in massacring the Defenceless Inhabitants upon which the bloody department was committed [to] a Seneca Indian while the Noble Brant with another party attacked the fort.

Though no one believed it, in time it would be believed and much more besides, and

Joseph Brant became one of the enduring legends of the Revolution: the paradox of the Christian Savage. Unlike most legends, it had a very real basis in truth, but like most legends, it would take on a life of its own, complete with lurid dialogue and the exchange of Masonic signs and handshakes. They came perilously close to obscuring the real man, who saved Katy Shankland and then treated himself and his men to her bread and butter.

Not long after the war, he was welcomed in New York, but stayed with his people in exile. He became a founding father of Ontario, and thus of English Canada. He remains one of the very few Indians admired by Americans while he was still dangerous to them.<sup>62</sup>

Walter Butler was said to have vowed never to serve with a large band of Indians again soon after Cherry Valley. He made a factual report to his superior, in which he exculpated himself and the others leaders (including Brant and the Mohawks) who tried to stop the slaughter at the place whose name he could bring himself to mention<sup>63</sup>—“the settlements”, he called it. His superiors accepted his account and endorsed his dispatch to London. He was never again to command an independent force in the field. Partly because as senior Captain of the Corps he took over many of his father’s duties, partly because after 1779 the Rangers took the field in small units operating in American territory, or as screens for large raiding parties commanded by field officers. It was on one such raid in 1781, the last ever to raid the Mohawk Valley, that he was killed, leading a rear-guard action against pursuing American regulars.<sup>64</sup>

Jane Campbell and her children came down from Montreal to Albany where she was soon joined by her husband Samuel. In the spring of 1784, they returned to Cherry Valley. Some of the other families had begun to do so as well, reclaiming the old farms from four years of waste and wilderness. Samuel Campbell built a cabin to shelter them while they tried to bring the land back to cultivation. He spent the spring and summer building a log house

on the site of his old home, because this was where they would winter. The house was finished by the end of summer and the crop had come up. News came that the valley was about to receive a visit.

General George Washington, Governor George Clinton, General Edward Hand and some officers of the New York Line had been making a tour of the Mohawk Valley, and had come down to visit Cherry Valley. They paid their respects to the Campbells, who invited them into their home. Governor Clinton asked after relations of his, Robert Shankland and his wife Katherine.

The next morning, upon their departure, Governor Clinton remarked upon the Campbell boys, "They will make fine soldiers in time."

"I hope my country will never need their services," answered Jane Campbell.

"I hope so too, madam, for I have seen enough of war", said George Washington.<sup>65</sup>

In a letter to the Marquis de Chastelleux, describing his recent journey to the frontier, Washington wrote

Prompted by these actual observations, I could not help taking a more contemplative and extensive view of the vast inland navigation of these United States, and could not but be struck with the immense diffusion and importance of it, and with the goodness of that Providence which has dealt his favours to us with so profuse a hand. Would to God we may have wisdom enough to improve them. I shall not rest contented until I have explored the western country and traversed those lines, (or great part of them) which have given bounds to a new empire.<sup>66</sup>

*The main threads of the story now seem apparent. The narrative gives us three groups of people: settlers, Loyalists and Iroquois. In the manner of narratives, each group has a personification. Walter Butler commanded the Loyalists and led the raid. Joseph Brant led only a small party of his Mohawk brethren; the Iroquois leaders were other men, but Joseph Brant came to personify the Iroquois participants in the popular imagination. Like Butler, Brant was a warrior of Homeric mold: brave, impetuous, resolute and merciful.*

*The settlers were victims, not actors but acted upon. That day their conduct was not Homeric and their only role was as the passive recipients of Homeric action. What was heroic was their endurance and resilience. They survived the raid and the later destruction of their settlement with the fabric of their community intact, and returned to re-establish their homes and families. Jane Campbell was the personification of that un-Homeric heroism. No one who survived the raid endured so much for so long before her return.*

*These elements are about to be fixed into place by the following generation, actual or spiritual descendants of the participants.*

## **Part Two**

### **Witnesses**

All history is revision. In the literal sense of the word, every look back, even by those closest to the event, re-views the fact and sees it in a new way. As the participants moved away in time and place, they recalled the event with varying perspectives. Most of these perspectives tended to reflect the needs and wishes of the beholders. This fully human need produced works that retain their value as insights into their makers long after their value as history has been superseded.

The settlers—now the citizens—of Cherry Valley; the American Iroquois and their partisans; the departed Loyalists, European and Iroquois; all had their visions of the real event of the raid and all applied their vision to the version of the story that they told. What is remarkable about those visions is how well they coincided. It is possible to use them to write a coherent, honest account of what happened at Cherry Valley. Even more remarkable is how some of those accounts were able to surpass the bounds of partisanship and acknowledge the humanity of once deadly enemies.

The accounts here do not stand alone; they rely on the gravity of the event described to give them weight. Their purpose is not to create but to remember. At first the story has little shape, and random facts are written down. Years later the narrative arises, and the partisan accounts cohere, extending their scope, touching on the accounts of former enemies until the blank places in the map are filled in.

## Chapter Two: Witnesses, 1782-1893

The villagers eventually returned and began to rebuild their homes. The war had ended, and with it the Iroquois threat; the once-mighty confederation had been fragmented and weakened by the war. Abandoned by their British allies, their choice was to emigrate to Upper Canada, later Ontario, or to stay in their old homelands and make the best deal they could with the Americans. Cherry Valley was close enough to the main track of new settlement in the Mohawk Valley to benefit from trade, and far enough to avoid the swarms of land-hungry squatters.

The village was finally left in peace, except by the past. Human remains might be found in the woods, and a missing person at last accounted for. Passers-by might look around and ask questions. The village had been politically divided by the Revolution, but the ordeal had been shared by all. There seems to have been an unspoken pact to put aside the divisions and unite in the face of an uncomprehending outside world. Other places expelled their Tories or marginalized them, but the still-young community, tightly knit by family ties and religion did not. The Patriot families were lauded, but the Tories were merely pitied. One of those families, that of Robert Wells, had suffered nearly a third of the toll of civilians killed, one child alone surviving. There was no need of further sacrifice.

They were all victims, and the men responsible were strangers. Even the soldiers of the garrison who failed to protect them were from Massachusetts. They had been left to themselves, and though they would respond optimistically to the promise of the new nation, they would retain a strong sense of who were friends and who were strangers.

Romance

*Anonymous, 1782*

Towards the end of the Revolution, a letter appeared in a Boston newspaper. It was

from a Captain Gerrish, dated Albany, March 7, 1782. He reported capturing supplies being sent from the West to British headquarters in Montreal, some for the personal attention of General Haldemand, Commander of the Northern Army in Canada.

Among the treasure were eight packages of 1045 scalps, forwarded from the Seneca by their agent, James Boyd. Each package was carefully invoiced. The first package contained forty-three scalps from soldiers and sixty-two from farmers. The second, third and fourth packages contained 297 scalps from farmers; eighteen of them marked with “a little yellow flame, to denote their being of prisoners burnt alive, after being scalped, their nails pulled out by the roots, and other torments.”

The fifth contained eighty-eight scalps from women. The sixth and seventh contained the scalps of 193 boys and 211 girls. The eight was a miscellany of 122 scalps, also containing a birch bark box holding twenty-nine scalps from infants.

The invoice was concluded by a message from the Seneca in council, accompanied by wampum belts, endorsing their efforts and requesting rewards. James Craufurd passed on the whole to his Excellency.<sup>67</sup>

It was apparent as early as 1831 that the letter was a fake. William Campbell acknowledged it as such in his *Annals*, but cited it as an imaginative version of the true story. He also cited speculation that it was the product of the pen of Benjamin Franklin.<sup>68</sup>

Propaganda is seldom listed among the creative efforts of a society, but it can tell us something--not as Campbell thought, about the British or the Seneca, but about the people who created it and the audience whom they supposed would believe it. In 1782, Americans were enduring the seventh year of what must have seemed to be an endless war, accompanied by a prolonged negotiation. It seems to have been no longer enough to appeal to the ideals of independence. It was now deemed necessary to go to the id. The spurious

details of the scalp invoice are designed to evoke a sense of disgust and a need for revenge. In reality, the British agents of the Indian Department were encouraged to reward the taking of captives and the offering of ransom. Scalps were “bought” only to placate those demanding payment for them, to keep them happy and leaning towards the British. The Patriots had made every effort to persuade the Indians to join their cause, or at least to remain neutral. Those who did join them were lauded and well paid, but they were a minority.

The reality of the Revolution on the New York Frontier was bad enough. Those in direct contact with the fighting seldom exaggerated the horrors; the death of family or a friend was terrible enough. This letter came from someone far removed from the fighting—perhaps Dr. Franklin, perhaps an unknown talent—designed to establish or reinforce a blood hatred of an inhuman enemy.

The only thing genuine about the letter is the date, March 7, 1782. By coincidence, on that exact date, far off on the Ohio borderlands, a party of Pennsylvania militia came to the Moravian missionary settlement of Gnadenhuetten. The Indians there were Christian converts and professed pacifists. The militia had been searching for raiders of the western settlements. Finding these people instead, they killed at least ninety of them.<sup>69</sup>

When the poor Wretches saw they had *no Protection* nigh, nor could possibly escape, and being without the least *Weapon* for Defence, they divided into their little Families, the Children clinging to the Parents; they fell on their Knees, protested their Innocence, declared their Love to the *English*, and that, in their whole Lives, they had never done them Injury; and in this Posture they all received the Hatchet! -- Men, Women and little Children -- were every one inhumanly murdered! -- in cold Blood!

The barbarous Men who committed the atrocious Fact, in Defiance of Government, of all Laws human and divine, and to the eternal Disgrace of their Country and Colour, then mounted their Horses, huzza'd in Triumph, as if they had gained a Victory, and rode off -- *unmolested!*

The Bodies of the Murdered were then brought out and exposed in the Street, till a Hole could be made in the Earth, to receive and cover them.



But the Wickedness cannot be covered, the Guilt will lie on the whole Land,  
till Justice is done on the Murderers. THE BLOOD OF THE INNOCENT  
WILL CRY TO HEAVEN FOR VENGEANCE.<sup>70</sup>

Benjamin Franklin wrote those words about the massacre of Conestoga Indians by a Pennsylvania mob, called the Paxton Boys, in 1763. His sentiments on the Gnadenhuetten massacre of 1782 do not seem to have found their way into print.

#### Travelers I

*Timothy Dwight, 1798*

In 1798 Timothy Dwight, the new President of Yale, was on one of his trips to the American hinterland, to New York's Mohawk Valley. He gathered information about the countryside, through personal witness and the witness of those he trusted. Because of them, he was able to report

Immense multitudes of oyster shells, a great number of them not petrified,  
are embodied in large masses of limestone at Cherry Valley, about sixty miles  
west of Albany.<sup>71</sup>

He never visited the village itself, staying on the main Mohawk Valley road. On October 1, he dined at Hudson's Ordinary in the village of Minden, across from East Canada Creek, not far from the site of a skirmish that took place seventeen years ago at the end of the Revolution. A raiding party of British, Loyalists and Indians were retreating to Canada after raiding Mohawk Valley settlements. They had successfully crossed the creek when the rear guard was fired upon and its leader, Walter Butler, was killed.

Dwight reported this local event, but not quite according to the facts. He reported that Butler was returning to Canada from his raid on Cherry Valley, which took place in 1778, that at this time he had destroyed settlements in the Mohawk on his way back to Canada, which actually occurred in 1781 on a raid in which he participated but did not command. He was in fact killed in 1781, but Dwight's story telescopes the raid on Cherry

Valley and the death of Butler into a few days, rather than three years, rather like Hollywood would do nearly 150 years later.

It is not Dwight's story, but that communicated to him by the Reverend Samuel Kirkland, apostle to the Iroquois. Kirkland related how Butler entered a house in Cherry Valley and ordered a woman and her newborn child to be slain, at which Joseph Brant protested

What, kill a woman and child! No, that child is not an enemy to the King, nor a friend to Congress. Long before he will be big enough to do any mischief, the dispute will be settled.

He placed a guard at the door to protect the family.<sup>72</sup> A survey of the factual literature may indicate a slight basis in fact. This was the Shankland house, which Brant protected and sheltered in briefly; Mrs. Shankland was not in childbed, and asserted positively that her family were King's people. Brant made a much less dramatic speech, to her instead of Butler, who was about a mile away at the fort at the time.

Kirkland's account of Butler's death is similarly dramatic and similarly suspect. Until his body was searched and his commission found, no one among the patriots realized that it was Butler who had been killed, but Kirkland told Dwight how Butler was

... overtaken by two Indian chiefs of the Oneida tribe, and wounded with the musket ball. When his enemies came up, he begged for quarter, but one of them with a hoarse and terrible voice cried out "Sherry Valley!" and dispatched him instantly with a tomahawk: a dreadful but just reward for his tigerlike cruelty.<sup>73</sup>

Kirkland was in a position to know this because of his missionary work among the Oneida. They and the Tuscarora had taken the Whig side in the Revolution, largely thanks to Kirkland's persuasion. As American allies, they remained in the United States when the Mohawks, led by Joseph Brant, immigrated to Upper Canada. Kirkland still worked among them, and advanced their claims to American gratitude in the face of American hunger for

Iroquois land, and the still-unnamed but always present sense of American manifest destiny, as voiced by George Washington during his western progress in 1784.

The very effective advocacy Kirkland used to advance the American cause made him enemies in the British Indian Department, charged with protecting and placating the Iroquois. Two officers of that department were John Butler and his son Walter. They had tried to force Kirkland's removal, but he was too popular among his flock. When the Revolution broke out, Kirkland became a hunted man, safe only among the Oneida. When it ended, Kirkland's cause was victorious and his enemies were dead or in exile, but his friends were not safe. The Oneida and Tuscarora had fought on the American side and had a claim to gratitude. Their Confederates the Cayuga, and Onondaga remained neutral; while the Seneca and Mohawk had allied themselves to the losing side. They were all Iroquois and the claims of America's friends might be balanced against the guilt of America's enemies and the unhelpful indifference of the neutrals.

So Kirkland had every reason to believe the stories his flock told him, stories which aided his own advocacy, and to combine them into tales that told a moral lesson. The good Iroquois aided the Americans and killed the evil Walter Butler, so vile that even the bad (or misguided) Iroquois Joseph Brant was revolted by his inhumanity. Butler's guilt also absolved the errant Tories who now settled Upper Canada and who must be lived with. John Butler and his Rangers were settling the Niagara peninsula, just across the river and the falls. His ablest captain, William Caldwell, was settled at Amherstberg, downriver from Detroit, American territory since 1783 but only just surrendered by the British three years before Dwight's journey down the Mohawk. They lived and their deeds in the late war were still remembered, but the symbolic atonement was the merciless death of Walter Butler.

Kirkland fostered a useful history of the late war that would protect his flock and

allow his countrymen to make peace with their former enemies. That it was a distortion of fact was a minor quibble, if it was a quibble at all; its usefulness far outweighed its dishonesty—an abomination unto the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble.

## Honor

*William Campbell, 1831*

Born and reared in that valley, I had, from early life, been in some way familiar with the incidents which had occurred there. They were interwoven with my earliest impressions; and I entered upon the business of arranging and compiling them with an interest which the subject, perhaps, did not merit . . . I have, however, dwelt more particularly upon the events which occurred in Cherry Valley; not that they were more important or interesting, but partly from reasons before mentioned, and partly for the reason that an accurate account of the minute transactions of that settlement was immediately within my reach, and upon the authenticity of which I could rely with the greatest confidence.<sup>74</sup>

Thus did William Campbell set forth his reasons for writing the history of his home place. His grandfather was a founder of the settlement; he himself had grown up in a place literally steeped in the blood of his family and friends. Campbell was trained in the law, not history, but then history was not yet a discipline, disinterested and scientific. In 1831, the men who would do that were still undergraduates in Germany. Campbell was a lawyer, so he wrote a case, and named it *Annals of Tryon County*.

He delineates the setting with a surveyor's precision and describes the land as a realtor might. He lists the patentees of the original grant, their transferees and their subsequent owners. Each of the founding families is named and set on their property. The settlers are established in their relationships with their neighbors on the Mohawk Valley frontier, white and Iroquois. They participated in all the civic duties of the time: building a school and a church, clearing the wilderness, sending men to the war against the French.

Campbell describes the efforts of the leaders of the settlement at the onset of the

Revolution. He reproduces the letters written by the Committee reporting their loyalty to the American cause and registering concern about the increasing activity of the Iroquois, who had not declared which side they were taking. Nearly all of those letters or petitions were signed by his grandfather, Samuel Campbell, a Colonel in the local militia.

The strategic significance of Cherry Valley is underlined by the visit of General Lafayette, who recommends a fort and a garrison. This also underlines the danger and exposure of the outpost, and the implicit courage of its citizens. The garrison arrives, regulars from Massachusetts led by Col. Alden. They are strangers to the frontier and seem unwilling to accept suggestions from the citizens. (Their service on the Indian frontier of Northern New York during Burgoyne's Invasion is not mentioned. James Fenimore Cooper's hidebound and unseasoned regular soldier, closed to advice from men who know Indians, is starting to become a staple of the frontier story.)

Alden moves his men into the stockade, improves it and refuses to allow the citizens to shelter inside. (The actual stockade was about fifty yards square, and had barely enough room to house the soldiers.) He reassures the citizens that his scouts will warn the valley in time. Rumors and foreshadowing arrive and are ignored.

The scouts meant to warn the settlements build a fire and go to sleep around it, and are captured. (The scouts were county militiamen, not regulars. Apparently Alden trusted too much in the men who knew Indians.) The settlement is surprised. The militia, called to the fort by the signal gun, is helpless to defend their families. The citizens are ravaged by Indians and Tories. Every death that can be described is given its due. Alden dies running to the fort. The Wells family is massacred in their house. A Tory ranger, a former servant, tries to rescue Jane Wells by claiming her as a sister, but sees her cut down. A Mohawk rescues a woman who stands over the body of her mother to prevent her being scalped. Joseph Brant comes

to the house of a Loyalist family (Campbell does not name them; they are neighbors yet), and calls in his Mohawk companions to protect them. He sends the woman and her children to hide in bed, feigning smallpox; from their bed, they hear the racket in the kitchen as Brant's men roast an ox for the first hot meal they eat in days. While the ox roasts, the Mohawks fill themselves with bread and butter.

A farmer comes home to find his family murdered, all but his young daughter, wounded but still alive. He sees more raiders approach. He hides, and from his hiding place, sees his daughter killed. A year later, when a Tory scout is captured, the farmer will identify him as his daughter's murderer.

The captives who survive that day are brought together to spend the night at open fires, guarded by Tories and the more manageable Indians. The next morning they are marched away; half a day into the march, nearly all are sent back to Cherry Valley. Those remaining are destined as hostages, to be exchanged for the families of Tories, held hostage in Albany. They are the families of prominent men, and one of them is William Campbell's grandmother.<sup>75</sup>

On the march, she sees her mother, old and weak, murdered by a young Seneca for slowing down the pace. Then she and her children are given to the care of another, older, Seneca, who treats them with kindness. In the Seneca country, the families spend the winter split up in different villages, and Mrs. Campbell is separated from the sons. She makes herself useful to her captors, and is given a limited freedom in the camp. They are curious about her way of life, and she of theirs. An old warrior asks her why women wear caps, and she tells him it is a custom. He gives her a cap, one taken from a woman he killed, and she recognizes the stitching of her friend Jane Wells. She tries to wash the blood from it.

In time, the prisoners are exchanged, and she is reunited with her sons. The youngest

has sent a year living with the Mohawk, and has forgotten his English; he greets her joyously in Mohawk. The Campbell's return to their homestead in Cherry Valley and rebuild their home. One guest in it is George Washington, on a tour of the western territory after the war. The boy who shakes his hand then will live long enough to shake the hand of General Grant in 1865.<sup>76</sup>

Campbell's story is the epic of his own family, who spanned the entire history of the settlement to the present date. They build it, fight for it, suffer for it and return. The years after the raid that the town was destroyed and abandoned were endured in captivity, and so it might be said that their spiritual presence was unbroken--the captives being a saving remnant of the just. Col. Campbell is not much more than a name among names, a succession of signatures to unanswered petitions. Mrs. Campbell is not so much described as her memories cataloged. That catalog of memory and experience is her life, just as the conventional "lives" of nineteenth-century figures were lists of the things they had done and the people they had known.

She had done nothing significant in the conventional sense; she simply endured captivity. The account of that is our only means of knowing her. She notes her own struggle, her feelings at the death of her mother and the memento of her friend. She is curious about the customs and the thoughts of her captors, enough so to be able to describe them accurately years later. Through her grandson, she describes the murder of her mother; through him, she quotes the words of the old Seneca who befriended her in captivity.

You are about to return to your home and your friends. I rejoice. You live a great way, many days journey from here. I am an old man, and do not know that I shall live to the end of this war. If I do, when this war is over, I will come and see you.<sup>77</sup>

Campbell is careful to shield his people. He describes the heroic defense of his home by

Robert Shankland against a small raiding party.<sup>78</sup> It is from another source that we know that it was his wife Catherine who was the woman defended by Joseph Brant; the woman who said that her family were King's people, and whose identity Campbell hid for that reason.<sup>79</sup> So the brave Robert Shankland was a loyalist—a thing accepted in Cherry Valley, but susceptible to misunderstanding in the wider world. We know also from other sources that the Tryon County Committee of Safety failed to keep Alden's regiment supplied with ammunition. The scouts that Alden relied upon, whom he sent out in the right direction to detect the raiders, but who fell asleep and were captured before they give warning, and gave up the secrets of the defenders--were also Tryon County men. This fact, and others, Campbell omits.

One other fact, the oddest omission of all: the hero of his story is his grandmother, but nowhere does he give her Christian name. Reserve or family esteem, perhaps: there was only one "Mrs. Campbell" in Cherry Valley; according to the *Lineage Book of the Daughters of the American Revolution*, in the section devoted to her husband and his descendants, she is identified as Jane Cannon Campbell, the Dominie's daughter, the Colonel's wife.<sup>80</sup>

#### Hero

*William Stone, 1838*

William Stone spent his youth and young manhood in the Mohawk Valley at a time when the old men and women of the Revolution still lived and told their stories. It occurred to him that these stories should not be lost and he began a design to write the history of this place and its great men, Sir William Johnson and Joseph Brant. That was his intent. Then he learned that another young man named William Campbell was already working on the same thing, and stopped at once. After Campbell published his *Annals*, Stone saw that the path was still clear for his own great project.



However, he could not do it. He had seen his project in two great parts, written around the lives of its two greatest men. Sir William Johnson's papers were dispersed in America and Europe; simply to gather them would be the work of years. The Brant papers were much closer to hand in Canada. More important, he was still in the reach of living memory; you could talk to a man who had known Brant. Stone wisely decided to write the second work of his history first, and to let it stand alone.<sup>81</sup>

Stone's work has only recently been superseded and still commands respect for the breadth of its research. He firmly believed in the scholarly discipline of history, rather than annals, and in the value of primary papers and sources. Campbell's *Annals* earned his respect, but it was the old school.

Stone was a modern man, but he was old school enough to know he must chose a hero for his subject, since such were the only worthy topic for a biographer. Like the lawyer who never asks a question without knowing what the answer will be, Stone knew that Brant was a hero; that he would find nothing new to change that belief, but only a body of evidence, which properly employed, would create an ironclad case for canonization. Stone's *Life of Brant* was the first modern biography of an Indian. It also seems to be a conscious effort to reserve a place in history for the opposition view of American progress.

In his forward Stone, like any good advocate, anticipates and demolishes arguments to the contrary of his position. He begins with Aesop's argument between the man and the lion as to who is superior. The man points at a heroic sculpture of a man standing over the body of a defeated lion. The lion replies that the lions would make a different statue. Stone reminds his readers of instances of inhuman cruelty by King Solomon and of the tortures used to punish the enemies of the Kings of England. He makes the sophisticated point that the Indian's barbarities were the norms of a culture that he was born into, and that supposed

Christians, claimed as heroic ancestors—the Massachusetts Bay settlers who exterminated the Wampanoags, the Puritans who sold Indians into West Indian slavery—had done worse, with more light given to them, than the pagan Indians.<sup>82</sup>

This must have been pretty rich stuff for 1838, when men still ran successfully for president with Indian-killing as a part of their resume. Whether or not Stone meant to rehabilitate the reputation of the Indian in order to help build his case for Brant, or use Brant to show that the first nations of America could produce a man as fine as the latest, he did both.

The foreword was the opening argument; the remainder of the two volumes was his case. Stone presented a case based upon anticipating every possible contrary argument. His description of the raid on Cherry Valley is based largely upon Campbell's, with additional documentary material from the American and Canadian archives--in this case a letter from Walter Butler to an American officer. It is presented with minimal commentary, and allowed to speak for itself. It would serve Stone's purpose to lay the entire blame for the killings at Cherry Valley upon Butler, but he only reports the blame placed by others. He enters the Butler letter as evidence to the character of a man who does not seem to be a savage. Facts, unless entered into evidence, are not facts--that's the lawyer talking.<sup>83</sup>

Stone does the same with his hero. He contrasts the witnessed, proven actions of Brant with the easily discredited tales and hearsay of previous attempts at history. Brant's actions at Cherry Valley and other places were humane and civilized; therefore, Brant is a decent man in character and a great man by his achievements.

William Stone's judgment on Joseph Brant would remain unchallenged for nearly 100 years. His *Life of Brant*, and Campbell's *Annals of Tyron County* became the accepted version of the events of November 11 and 12, 1778. Campbell gave the village's story, and

Stone told of Brant's participation, and thus the Indian side. That left the Tories. Stone placed more documentation about the Loyalists into the record than anyone before and many since, but they were not the focus of his work. The Tories who represented passive reaction to change, who threatened no one, were acceptably non-threatening. The Wells family was to be pitied; Katy Shankland deserved only to be rescued.

The Tories, who came down out of Canada, armed and dangerous, were another matter. They had no friends or kin on the American side of the border, or none that would own to it, and the Canadians, their descendants, said little of their fiery past.

## Travelers 2

*Benson Lossing, 1848*

Timothy Dwight of Yale was an exemplar of the American Enlightenment, a polymath at ease writing about seashells in upstate New York, its Iroquois inhabitants or an epic poem about the conquest of Canaan. His work was meant to instruct and to instill moral principles. Benson Lossing wrote to instruct and entertain. Rather like a one man National Geographic Society, Lossing traveled to historic sites, describing his visit and explaining its importance in American history with exciting and dramatic stories. In August 1848, he went to Cherry Valley.

He went by way of Sharon Springs, the noted mineral spa eight miles west of the village. He includes an analysis of the chemical contents of the sulfur springs that are the foundation of the spa as well as remarking on their odor

How any but invalids, who find the waters less nauseous than the allopathic doses of the shops, and, consequently, are happier than at home, can spend a "season" there, within smelling distance of the gaseous fountains, and call the sojourn *pleasure*, is, a question that can only be solved by Fashion, the shrewd alchemist in whose alembic common miseries are transmuted into conventional happiness.<sup>84</sup>

He was Cherry Valley the next day, and met the town's most prominent citizen, Judge James Campbell, the six-year-old boy taken as a captive to Niagara in 1778 with his mother but separated from her soon afterwards, who had forgotten his English and spoke to her in Mohawk when they were reunited two years later. From him Lossing learned that Jane Campbell had died only twelve years before in 1836, at the age of ninety-three, the "... last survivor of the Revolutionary women in the region of the head waters of the Susquehanna." He lived in a house built on the site of the old stockaded house destroyed during the war. Campbell showed him the valley and a vantage point a mile and a quarter north of town, from which Lossing sketched the village:



and Brant's Rock, the rock behind which the body of a soldier killed by Joseph Brant was found by the villagers.<sup>85</sup>

In a previous chapter, Lossing outlines the history of the war waged in the Mohawk Valley and describes the raid and massacre of Cherry Valley. Writing after Dwight, Stone and William Campbell, he repeats some of their stories. He includes instances of the chivalry of Joseph Brant, and instances of the villainy (and a facsimile of the signature) of Walter Butler:

*Walter Butler*

... he had sworn vengeance, and his bad heart would not be content until its cravings were satisfied. Tender charity may seek to cloak his crimes with the

plea that partisan warfare justified his deeds; and lapse of time, which mellows such crimson tints in the picture of a man's character, may temper the asperity with which shocked humanity views his conduct; yet a just judgment, founded upon observation of his brief career, must pronounce it a stain upon the generation in which he lived. After the destruction of Cherry Valley his course was short, but bold, cruel, and bloody.<sup>86</sup>

This was to be his reputation throughout the century and well into the next, at least in the United States: *vengeance . . . a bad heart . . . bold, cruel and bloody*. Such words are also the soul of melodrama, and describe a part that any actor would have killed to play. The one who did play him was a Barrymore.

### Icon

*Alonso Chappel, 1856*

He was not a great artist, nor did he aspire to be. His father was a poor tinsmith. His only schooling was a few lessons on drawing anatomy from sculpture. There is no evidence that he ever drew a line not calculated to help him earn his living, which he managed to do for a long life.

Alonso Chappel painted what was wanted in the young Republic, paintings meant to inspire patriotic virtue and emulation, Presidents and the heroic past. That his early works were used to illustrate serious works of history and current events created for him a market that he would spend the rest of his life satisfying.<sup>87</sup>

One of these, a painting reproduced widely as an engraving by Thomas Phillibrown, was *Incident in Cherry Valley—Fate of Jane Wells*.<sup>88</sup> It shows the well-known murder of Jane Wells by one of the Seneca who attacked the Wells house, shown in the background. A former servant, now a Loyalist ranger, tries to prevent the hatchet from falling on her; she kneels in the snow, praying for deliverance which we know will not come.



The implacable rage of the Indian, the upraised hatchet and the helpless woman all recall John Vanderlyn's painting of the death of Jane McCrea, another helpless Tory victim of the red man's unreason. In that sense, it is an ordinary expression of the fear of the other.

In another sense, it is unique, at least in the survey of this literature. It

is the first work by an outsider that addresses the reality of the event that day, a reality centered in death. Cherry Valley became famous for the numbers who died there, and who they were, innocent non-combatants, many of them, like the Wells family, passive allies of the raiders. The brave young man springs to her defense, risking his own life, but he will not save her. The movement of the men, the planes of action of their arms and bodies all point to the helpless victim about to die, surrounding her; rescuer and murderer fix her in place, unable to escape.

Broadside

*Massacre of Cherry Valley, 1873*

In 1807, the Scottish poet Thomas Moore wrote an epic poem, *Gertrude of Wyoming*, a

tragedy about the settlements on the lower Susquehanna and their destruction by John Butler's raid in 1778. One of the poem's minor villains was "the monster Brant", despite the fact that Joseph Brant was nowhere near the Wyoming Valley at the time of John Butler's raid; a fact pointed out to the poet by John Brant, Joseph's son. Moore apologized, and in the pages of a magazine as well.<sup>89</sup>

Such a prompt and vigorous defense of his reputation may explain why Brant, or the Cherry Valley massacre, do not seem to have been the subjects of a play during those decades of the American theatre when Indian and frontier subjects were popular. However, there were other American theatres besides Broadway's, and on Wednesday, August 6, 1873, at Academy Hall, Cherry Valley the original play *Massacre of Cherry Valley* was presented. We have nothing to know it by, other than a surviving broadside.<sup>90</sup> From it we can see that the evening began with a song, *Cherry Valley*, followed by a prologue spoken by Master Walter Campbell, probably one of *the* Campbells, but with an unlikely Christian name. The first act is set in the woods near Cherry Valley, with actors portraying Joseph Brant, Capt. McKean (captain of the village's ranger company and the apparent hero) and Jane Moore, the apparent heroine. The second act is a young ladies' party, including Jane Moore and some other young women, one of them the doomed Jane Wells. The third act is set in the Campbell house, and matrons are portrayed: Jane Campbell and her mother, Mrs. Clyde, the wife of a prominent Patriot, and the alarming Mollie Brant, consort of Sir William Johnson, female sachem of the Mohawk and sister to Joseph; her presence in the scene absolutely ahistorical.

The fourth act is set in the woods at an Indian council and actors play Joseph Brant and other Iroquois leaders, and Walter Butler. It is a pretty good guess that they're planning the events of Act 5, the attack on Cherry Valley.

**EXHIBITION**  
AT  
**ACADEMY HALL, CHERRY VALLEY,**  
Wednesday Evening, August 6.  
**ORIGINAL PLAY.**  
**Massacre of Cherry Valley.**

**MUSIC.**

Introductory Song—Cherry Valley.....(HOPKINS.)  
Prologue.....Master WALTER CAMPBELL.

**Act 1st.**

SCENE.....Edge of Woods near Cherry Valley.  
Characters.....Joseph Brant, Capt. McKean, Jane Moore.

**Act 2d.**

SCENE.....Private house—Young Ladies' Party.  
Characters.....Jane Wells, Mollie Moore, Jane Moore, Eleanor Wilson, Jennie Wilson, Margaret Wilson, Nancy Clyde, Aunt Mercy, Uncle Peter, Master Matthew Campbell.

**Act 3d.**

SCENE.....Apartment in Col. Campbell's house.  
Characters.....Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Cannon, Mrs. Clyde, Eleanor Wilson, Mollie Brant, Matthew Campbell.

**Act 4th.**

SCENE.....Indian Council Fire in Forest.  
Characters.....Joseph Brant, Little Anon, Captain Butler, Gustavusda, Young-waggonah.

**Act 5th.**

SCENE 1st—Attack on Cherry Valley. Scene 2d—Massacre of Jane Wells. Scene 3d—Soliloquy of Mr. Mitchell. Scene 4th—Nancy Clyde in the Woods.

**Act 6th.**

SCENE—Woods near Indian Encampment the night after the Massacre—Jane Moore tied to a tree.  
Characters.....Brant, Capt. Butler, Mrs. Moore, Jane Moore.

**Act 7th.**

SCENE.....Near Fort Niagara.  
Characters.....Jane Moore, Brant, Miss Oregon, Capt. Butler, Capt. McKean.

**MUSIC—Soldier's Dirge,**.....(HOPKINS.)

**The Tories' Recompense.**

A LAUGHABLE FARCE—(Sequel to the "Massacre of Cherry Valley.")

ACT 1st—Scene 1st.....Public Room in Cherry Valley.  
Characters.....Col. Campbell, Col. Clyde, Mr. Mitchell.

Scene 2d—Public Room—Evening—Trial of Jack Foster.  
Characters.....John Campbell, Judge; S. Clyde, Counsel against; James Wilson, Counsel for; Jack Foster, Criminal Tory; Hugh Mitchell, John McKellip, Ramsey, James Dickson, witnesses.

ACT 2d—Scene 1st.....Punishment of Tories.  
Characters.....The Court resolved into an executive committee of the whole—Council and Wardance.

Scene 2d—Fortifying at the Stake.  
Characters.....Jack Foster, Henry Deal, Peter Smith, Tories.

Single Tickets 15 cents; Two for 25 cents.

Best Front Seats reserved for all who purchase Tickets at the usual places, before 5 o'clock p. m. Wednesday Aug. 6

This is only the first scene; scene two is "Massacre of Jane Wells." The third scene is a soliloquy by Mr. Mitchell, the farmer who witnessed the murder of his daughter, and the fourth scene portrays Nancy Clyde hiding in the woods alone the day and night of the raid. These are all based on the real events of the massacre, and do not include fictional characters.

That changes in the sixth act, portraying the night after the massacre near the Indian camp. Jane Moore is tied to a tree. Brant and Butler also appear. The last scene is set near the British Fort Niagara. Capt. McKean reappears at last, to confront Butler and Brant, and possibly to rescue Jane Moore. The play ends with a *Soldier's Dirge*, but not the night's entertainment. *The Tories' Recompense*, "A Laughable Farce," follows. Act One is in a public room: Colonel's Campbell and Moore hear from Mr. Mitchell, presumably relating the events of his soliloquy from act

five. The next scene is the trial of the fictitious Tory Jack Foster, including counsel for and



against, and witnesses. The trail's apparent outcome is in act two, "Punishment of Tories," the action of which seems to involve a war dance, and a prelude to the final scene, "Torturing at the Stake." You got a lot for your 15¢.

It was also people, nearly a hundred years after the event, attempting to reclaim their past. This happened *here*. Since the Revolution, the history of Cherry Valley was peaceful recovery and restoration. The Campbells had retained their prominence in the community almost until the onset of the Civil War. The village was the center of a prosperous farming community. History was something that now always happened somewhere else. Facts once related from mother to son, and published as filial piety, could now be viewed on stage as a romance, with a farce at the end; the distance was there at last.

#### Gossip From the Forest

*Jeptha Simms, 1883*

Schoolteacher, shopkeeper, railroad agent, Jeptha Simms pursued a career of marginal failure in every trade he followed that paid a wage. His real avocation was local historian, and his historical method was to gather every version of every story told about the past in his chosen home, the Mohawk Valley. His method left him open to charges of reporting truth and untruth indiscriminately, a charge he denied:

When writers are obliged to rely principally on oral testimony for what they publish, they are liable, from the treachery of memory in some, and the fondness for the marvelous in others, to imposition, to be practised in turn upon their readers. Aware of this, in matters of importance I have principally confined my inquiries to individuals sustaining a character of conscientious regard for the truth. More than this, I have had the same stories related by as many different persons as possible, often strangers to each other; and then, on carefully examining their testimony, have been enabled to arrive, as I believe, very satisfactorily at the truth.<sup>91</sup>

It is a method that requires judgment, usually acquired through experience, and by the time of his death in 1883, Jeptha Simms had been talking to people about the past for more than

40 years. His posthumous-published second volume of *The Frontiersmen of New York* contained an account of the death of Walter Butler. It was told to him by the sons of the men who had witnessed the death, and told the stories that their fathers had told. Such stories give even judicious historians nightmares. Simms always gave the source of his story, which at least allows his readers to consider the source.

They said that Butler was at the very rear of the retreating column of raiders. He was in the act of drinking water from a tin cup. Two men, scouting ahead of the pursuing Patriots, saw Butler and fired at him. One, a valley man, Daniel Odenkirk, had aimed at the glint of the tin cup; he was sure his shot had told. The other, a friendly Mohawk, dropped his blanket and rifle and ran ahead to the wounded Butler, who asked for quarter. The Mohawk, called Anthony, replied “Me give you Sherry Falley quarters” and tomahawked him. He was about to take Butler’s scalp when the officers leading the pursuit arrived, and Anthony thought it proper to seek permission. No one demurring, it was done. He also took Butler’s uniform coat and put it on, with mocking airs, telling his fellow scout that now he was a British officer. Odenkirk reminded him that he might be shot by one of the soldiers from the main party now coming up, at which Anthony quickly shed the coat.<sup>92</sup>

What to believe? The “Sherry Falley” quote also appeared in Dwight’s account, in the mouth of one of Dwight’s flock, an Oneida; the sons might have read it there and added it to their father’s account, if the fathers had not done it themselves. Others details are new, and have what might be called the ring of truth, or imaginative fiction: the glint of the tin cup, the discussion over scalping rights, the capering in a looted coat. It is the series of mundane, banal, human details that add verisimilitude to Simms’ report. It could have happened that way.

## True North

*Ernest Cruikshank, 1893*

In 1893, a Canadian amateur historian and militia colonel, Ernest A. Cruikshank, would publish an article and a monograph. The monograph was a complete and concise history of Butler's Rangers, the Loyalist corps raised by John Butler. Using primary sources, it detailed that corps' activities in the Revolution, in which John's son Walter figured prominently. Cruikshank spent time particularly on Cherry Valley, based on Loyalist accounts, reports and memoirs. He provided the Loyalist version for the first time in an historical work, expanding on the Iroquois account given by Stone.<sup>93</sup>

The article dealt entirely with the life and career of Walter Butler. It was fourteen pages long, and told every fact of historical significance about that young man. Most men who die before thirty do not leave half that much to tell, so it is fair to say that barring some undiscovered manuscript, Cruikshank's article is the last word on a minor but dramatic figure of the Revolution.<sup>94</sup>

The men who served in Butler's Rangers settled mainly in the Niagara Peninsula. A few made it farther west—one settled the town of Delaware, Ontario. If you pass through it on your way to Stratford, you might not think that it was settled by a man who served in a corps that was a byword for savagery on the New York frontier. Canadian towns tend to have a very peaceful look, even including the obelisks memorializing the Great War dead, with incongruously long lists of names for such small towns. This contrast was one of the first things that drew me to this subject: how such a peaceful place could be connected with such a bloody past—even allowing for the knowledge that “ordinary men,” in Christopher Browning's phrase, are capable of anything.

Cruikshank's two works are an effort to set the record straight and retrieve this

aspect of the Revolution from the mythology overtaking it. It is clear that the contact zone between the Europeans and the Iroquois was not a place that rewarded altruistic behavior. Cruikshank proves his case by showing that the Loyalists were no worse than the Patriots were, and sometimes better. He makes the patriots looking bad simply by showing them as they were, and allowing the reader to contrast that to what they claimed to be.

Cruikshank is a bit dry and unromantic—he was, after all, from Ontario—but he nails down every fact about Walter Butler, whom he shows to be a moderately ambitious, brave and able subaltern. He had trouble when he tried to command Indians, but then so did most Indian chiefs. He was out of his depth on the frontier, but most people are, and he was as good as any, and better than some. That is the sum of what we know of the real man named Walter Butler, soon to be overtaken by an imaginary man of the same name.

*There would be later histories and recollections, but the factual basis for the matter of Cherry Valley was now in place. Already some artists, however naïve, had attempted to deal with it through art. Most of these writers and artists worked in a manner that could be called organic; they created works out of familial or local piety. It was important to them. They wrote what they did for a higher purpose. Choosing a topic that was very close to their own lives, they lacked the perspective to see its true importance.*

*An unknown propagandist wrote to reinforce loyalty to a cause at the end of a long war. Samuel Kirkland wanted to claim his nation's attention to his parishioners, the deserving loyal Oneidas. William Campbell wrote to establish the reputation of his community and family. William Stone was more ambitious, but still remained in his home place and chose a subject who had walked the same woods as he, and whose memory was living in that place. Benson Lossing's visit to Cherry Valley, and its place in his historical gazetteer, places the village and its story in the national context, while Alonso Chappell first places it in the iconography of national sacrifice.*

*The indefatigable Jephtha Simms gathered every fact he could find. If he was not as selective as later historians would like, he was inclusive enough to create a body of knowledge about what was believed of the past in his own time, and its truth is less important than that belief. If he was naïve, it was the naivety that believed that honest people tell true stories, and that error and truth would emerge in the retelling. If nothing else, he passed on a body of lore that made fiction seem pale. Ernest Cruikshank did not. He told the historical truth, and did his best to make it seem pale in comparison to the violent romance written about the frontier war and its most notorious figure, Walter Butler.*

*Nearly all made an honest effort to place facts into evidence. While later historians have examined the story in greater depth, few deny that the old rough outline created by these pathfinders is largely correct. The three threads of the story are now in place: the resistance of the Loyalists to the new order, the fall of the Iroquois and the endurance of the settlers.*

*Now less naïve artists would take these materials and create other art. What matters more now is not the quality of that art but the nature of its selection. Given the materials at hand, which were used, and which were ignored? The choice seems erratic and personal, like the looting of a darkened house.*

*Standing apart from all this is the tradition being built in Cherry Valley. In possession of their own story, they passed it on in their own way, almost isolated from the popular culture that was about to high-jack the matter of Cherry Valley, scavenge it for their own needs and discard the rest, regardless of its worth. For the rest of the century and well into the next, the people of Cherry Valley would preserve their memories to pass on and create a “control,” an alternative tradition in opposition to the thing created by the popular culture.*

### Chapter Three: Virtus *Decorata*, 1840-1878

*The people of Cherry Valley took it into their own hands to create commemorations of their own past. These occurred on the two great days of their history, the centennials of the founding and the destruction of the village. They were solemn and high-minded, and included many of the rites of American civic religion, invoking a heroic past to keep the eyes of the citizens looking forward to an equally heroic future.*

*The years that followed the writing of histories by men like Campbell and Stone allowed their lessons to seep into the consciousness of the townspeople. They seemed to be aware that they bore the burden of constantly reinforcing the vision and faith of their hallowed forebears, and ensuring that their terrible sacrifice of 1778 would be remembered and justified by their descendants. The Commemorations of 1840 and 1878 were to be witnessed by the living and the dead, to enforce remembrance by the one and foster assurance to the other.*

*Yet it was not always possible to be high-minded, and at least one other commemoration occurred; one to which governors and orators were not invited. It did not arise from civic religion, but from another place, a lower but not a lesser part of American culture.*

The centennial of the settlement of Cherry Valley was celebrated on July 4, 1840. At 10.30 a.m., a procession set out from Wilkins' Hotel to the house of Dr. Campbell. The marchers were the company of Cherry Valley Volunteers; William W. Campbell Esq., Mr. David Little, the Clergy; the President and Vice-President of the day's activities; the Committee of Arrangements; veterans of the Revolution; strangers and citizens.

At Dr. Campbell's house, they met Governor William Seward and Dr. Eliphalet Nott of Union College. The size of the assembly precluding the planned meeting place, the Presbyterian Church; the celebration was held on the College green.<sup>95</sup>

Mr. David Little read the Declaration of Independence. William W. Campbell, late of

Cherry Valley and now a resident of New York, gave the main address. He started by invoking the spirit of the recently departed Bard of Abbotsford, Sir Walter Scott, describing the array of characters created by his pen, ending with the “artless simplicity and heroic fortitude” of the personification of the class of common citizen, Jeannie Deans. These were the heroes of his narrative, the founding and settlement of Cherry Valley. Beginning with the landing of the first families at Casco Bay, he traced their progress into the wilderness, the birth of their settlement, its improvement, the war and the massacre, and the abandonment of the settlement.

Mr. Campbell paid tribute to the first act of the returning settlers, to reestablish their church, resulting in the presence of Dr. Nott, and the beginning of his half-century of ministry. He spoke of the founding families of the town; his parents, Col. and Mrs. Campbell; the Clydes, Dunlops, McKears, Shanklands, Gaults, Dicksons, Ramseys, and the Wilsons, now all departed, most of them resting in the churchyard nearby. He spoke of his niece, the late missionary to Oroomiah, Persia.

From the past, he cast his eyes to the future. Looking forward to the day 100 years hence, he forecast that day July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1940, when a united people would “occupy the greater part of all North America”, numbering “at least fifty millions of inhabitants”.<sup>96</sup>

After the dinner that followed, Governor Seward spoke briefly and generically about the liberties of America and New York. Toasts were drunk (temperately, at the suggestion of Dr. Nott) to the Governor, to Cherry Valley, to Dr. Nott. Regular toasts, accompanied by the firing of cannon, were then drunk to the Fourth, to Old Otsego, to Constitutional Union, to Washington, Our Army and Navy, The President, Our Judiciary, The Signers of the Declaration, New York, the Governor and Lt. Governor, Common Schools, Colleges, and the surviving Soldiers of the Revolution.

Letters by absent well-wishers were then read, and “the company separated with the kindest and best feeling, and highly gratified with the performances of the day”<sup>97</sup>

A public dinner was held at Cherry Valley, on the celebration of the centennial of the United States in 1876. At that dinner, Mr. Douglas Campbell spoke of the duty of erecting a public monument to the memory of the fallen of 1778. He hoped that the next two years would see it accomplished. A committee was established, a design proposed and agreed upon, not to exceed 800 dollars.<sup>98</sup> Subscriptions were solicited; the largest sum, \$60, was made by Thomas L. Wells of New Jersey, grandson of the sole survivor of the Wells family.<sup>99</sup>

On August 15, 1878, the monument was dedicated. The small town was packed by noon, and at 1 o'clock, the procession marched to the cemetery. The program began with a dirge by the band, followed by a prayer from Dr. Eliphalet Nott Potter, President of Union College. After an ode by the choir, and remarks by the President of the Day, Governor Horatio Seymour gave his address.

The monument was then unveiled.

The honors were done by Thomas Wells, William Campbell, DeWitt Clyde, S.C. Willson and J.B. Thompson, descendants of the memorialized. The Monument was eight feet tall, five by seven feet rectangular and weighed twenty tons. It was designed by the Rev. H.U. Swinnerton of the village's Presbyterian Church, and carved by Almon Brown, also of Cherry Valley. It was laid upon the mass grave of the fallen of November 11. The granite base supported carved marble. The four sides bore the names:

CHERRY VALLEY  
ORISKANY  
FRONTENAC  
DURLAGH



The face of the monument bore the words:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY  
OF THOSE WHO FELL BY MASSACRE, IN THE DEVASTATION  
OF THIS VILLAGE AT THE HANDS OF THE TORIES AND  
IROQUOIS UNDER BRANT AND BUTLER  
NOVEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>, A.D., 1778

The reverse bore the names of the fallen: the soldiers, the citizens and their wives and children, and men of the village killed in battle. Panels on the corners contained these words:

VICUS CONDITUS 1740  
LIBERTAS ASSERTA 1775  
VASTATUS PER COEDEM 1778  
VIRTUS DECORATA 1878

At the north end of the monument was engraved the Bible and ax and a gun; on the pediment was a tomahawk and a burning brand. On the south end was engraved a cross and a laurel wreath; a trumpet and an inverted torch on the pediment.<sup>100</sup>

After the unveiling, the program continued. Mr. J.C. Johnson of Boston had written a lyro-epic for the occasion, "An Idyl of Cherry Valley," singing the story of the place from Indian times.

Fair land and free land, through those distant ages,  
Ripening and waiting still, to be our home.  
O, glorious land, O silent land,  
Our own fair home, our own loved home.

To settlement

Ah! Soon arise the cottage walls,  
And shines the cheerful fire!  
Around cry "welcome" all the winds!  
Loud sings the forest choir!

To war

Alas! That this must be! No peaceful home is here!  
What ruddy flames! What sounds of war!  
Mid fire and blood! Mid cries of woe!  
The cottage walls!—the hopes of years!

In dust and ashes lie!

And to the present

For sorrow's brief, and pleasure long,  
And years roll swift away,  
And for a hundred harvest rich  
We raise the song to-day.<sup>101</sup>

The next speaker was Major Douglas Campbell. He reviewed the history of the memorial since the centennial of village thirty-eight years before. He reminded the audience that they were not celebrating a victory but commemorating a tragedy—one whose root did not lay in the traditional warfare between whites and Indians:

Trace back the colonial history of the country, and we find the same record which the West presents to day, where the plundered, half-starved wards of the nation, when they can bear no more, break out in the frenzy of despair . . . But follow the uprising of the Indians to its origin, and there was always back of it the crime of the dishonest or the outrage of the fiendish white man.<sup>102</sup>

Cherry Valley was different:

The lands here had been purchased in good faith, the Indian title had been quieted, and there was never an adverse claimant. No injustice or wrong had been perpetrated upon the red man. On the contrary, the most friendly relations existed between the races; and among the inhabitants of this valley, Brant, the Mohawk Chief, numbered some of his dearest friends.<sup>103</sup>

Then he discussed the inhabitants of the New York frontier at the eve of the Revolution. The Iroquois: "Sage in counsel, wily in diplomacy and fearless in battle, they have well been called the Romans of America." The "cosmopolitan" settlers of New York, the Dutch and Huguenot French; the Palatine Germans and Scotch-Irish, all of them refugees from the oppression of European kings and sects, seeking freedom in America. All united in the fire of the French and Indian War, fighting together against the French and their Indian allies. The Revolution divided them. The men who had fought to keep those liberties threatened by French oppression would not surrender them to English overlords.

Temperately but firmly the inhabitants of the frontier asserted their loyalty and their resolve as well.<sup>104</sup>

The war came. Cherry Valley sent out its company to fight the invasion from Canada and the remainder fortified their homes from the threat of individual raids. One such raid devastated Cherry Valley. Its source was not the just grievance of brutalized Indians, but the will of the agents of royal oppression; Cherry Valley was an outpost of liberty, not thievery. Tryon County contained 2500 able-bodied men at the outbreak of war; at war's end it held 1200 citizens, 300 widows and 2000 orphans.<sup>105</sup>

Yet this sacrifice, still alive in the hearts of the citizens of central New York, is not to be found in the schoolbooks or the "more pretentious histories," where New York's role in the Revolution is a place to be captured and a nursery for Tories. Campbell calls upon the audience, as he closed, to teach their children the pivotal role, and the sacrifice, of New York in the war for independence.<sup>106</sup>

The Honorable S.C. Willson and Col. W.W. Snow made short speeches and the ceremony ended with the brief remarks of the Reverend President Potter. The Choir then sang "America", the Reverend H.U. Swinnerton pronounced benediction and the audience departed.<sup>107</sup>

Twenty-nine years later Mrs. Mary S. Leaning gave an anniversary lecture to the Cherry Valley Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She described the history of Cherry Valley, complete with tableaux vivant:

Parson Dunlap Plowing  
Colonial Settlers Going to Church  
Boys Playing Soldier  
Death of Lieutenant Warmuth

Mrs. Clyde and her Children  
The Captives  
War Dance

Then she described the history of the D.A.R., founded two years after the centennial of the massacre, and the organization of the local Chapter; its twelve members were the bare minimum to hold the Charter. She spoke of past efforts to commemorate the village's history, and of the Chapter's efforts in marking important sites, culminating to date with the marking of the site of Fort Alden. Guided by knowledgeable gentlemen, the Daughters obtained two ten-inch mortars and forty ten-inch shells, set aside by the War Department for the purpose of marking patriotic sites, and by now growing scarce. This arsenal was now in storage, awaiting the completion of mounts appropriate for the site. Then Mrs. Leaning said

A question that often confronts us is this; "What is the use of all this dipping and delving and explaining and scrutinizing and rummaging and ransacking old records . . . What will be the benefit to yourself or anyone else?" There are many things desirable beside food, clothing and shelter. Is there a man or woman here to-night who does not wish to contribute one little coal to lay upon the fire of patriotism that is burning in this village?

She noted that they were meeting in the

. . . new Town Hall, which itself stands as an epoch in village progress. How fitting! How appropriate; that the first audience gathered within these walls, should come here to look back upon the beginnings of the things that made us a village . . . <sup>108</sup>

Their beginnings and the past had become the story of Cherry Valley. At the turn of the nineteenth century, considerable prospects for the future development of the village were foreseen. It lay upon the axis of two major trails, the western turnpike from Albany to Syracuse and the old Indian trail from the Mohawk Valley to the settlements on the Susquehanna, and down that river to Philadelphia. In 1830, there were no less than twenty-nine licensed venues for liquor in the village, and it was common to see thirty or forty wagons parked overnight in the square. Then progress was diverted to other places, by the opening of the Erie Canal from the Mohawk Valley in 1825 and its expansion in capacity in

1862, and the individual lines that became the New York Central Railroad, which started laying track in 1831. The two old roads were state or regional routes; the canal and railroad were of national importance, the connection between New York and the West.<sup>109</sup> The traffic that passed through Cherry Valley now was local. It was still the mid-point of the road that connected Albany and Syracuse, and all the other small towns and villages between the two.

The village's diminution was beginning to take place by the time of the centennial in 1840, but it hardly seems to intrude. Hope remains for the future. By 1878, the truth was plain. The commemoration recalls the heroic, tragic past, including the extinguishing of the village and the exile of its people. It also recalls the rebirth of the village, blessed by the secular American divinity of George Washington. A story often repeated is that of James S. Campbell, the boy taken captive with his mother, brothers and sister, and separated from them and sent to live in the Mohawk village of Caughnawaga for two years. Reunited with his mother, he could not speak to her except in Mohawk, having forgotten English. They returned to Cherry Valley, where he shook the hand of Washington upon the occasion of the great man's visit during his inland progress. When James Campbell was past eighty, he returned with his son William to Caughnawaga, where he tried in vain to find anyone he had known, finding only a woman who remembered the stories told by her grandmother of a captive boy.

He was visiting his son in Albany when Ulysses S. Grant came to participate in the celebrations marking the end of the war of the Rebellion. They met and General Grant expressed interest in his story, in the fact of his being a captive in the war of the Revolution, and that he was now shaking the hand of a man who had shaken hands with George Washington.<sup>110</sup>

So all things pass, the great men, the old places, but something remains if only in

memory. The memory of past trials fortifies against present ones. We look at the past and see what was sacrificed so that we may live today, and the sacrifice was not for the banal prosperity of a road or rail hub or a factory town. The stone memorial, crafted in their own village, marking the common grave of the lost, was there to remind them that, could the dead speak, they might wish for nothing more than those who live on after them be safe and free, and live on the way that their fathers lived in the good place their fathers had chosen. They might wish also to be remembered, and the place where they lived and died be kept alive by their descendents, so keeping them alive in it as well.

*The people of Cherry Valley demonstrated throughout the second century of their village's existence that they were ready to assume the burden of their history. They kept alive the story of their heroic ancestors, and reminded the outside world with quiet force what had happened and who had remembered it. After 1878 and the dedication of the memorial, those calls upon the wider world seemed to cease. Festivals and commemorations became local and inner-directed: this is what you know when you live here.*

*Now the wider world was aware of Cherry Valley, its story and its actors. The 1878 Commemoration may even have been the direct cause of one writer's imagination being sparked into an idea for a novel. It was a good idea for a novel, but like so many ambitious projects, something happened along the way.*

## Part Three

### The Foundry of Myth

The story of Cherry Valley is over. It began in 1741 and ended with the centennial of the massacre in 1878. The place lives on still, and the memory of the history with it, but the story is only another memory now. The Monument in the cemetery is now as much a part of the viewshed of the place as the hills that border the valley, and no more a part of life than those hills. That whole history that ended in 1878 is what a student of folklore and legend would call the *matter* of Cherry Valley. It is a body of facts and strong traditions that made up a coherent story that happened to be largely factual.

The elements include an innocent village, built on land obtained by honest dealings with the original inhabitants, and fair relations with them afterwards. The villagers do not seek their position as an outpost, but accept it and conduct themselves honorably, and treat dissenters with forbearance.

Their one-time friend Joseph Brant conducts his warfare with as much mercy as can exist on the frontier; even in wartime, his enemies acknowledge his humanity. Their enemy Walter Butler, however reviled for his cruel manner of war, is feared and respected for his courage and leadership.

This was civil war. I called “humanity” Brant’s mercy to those in his power, but “humanity” is also destroying the lives and livelihood of people one knows. In that sense, inhumanity is to bring havoc to strangers, the usual course of frontier warfare. There is something uncommonly intimate in the story of the raid on Cherry Valley that is not present in most stories of the Revolutionary frontier. These people knew each other. When the war finally comes to Cherry Valley, it is a war of neighbors, not strangers.

The entire village was destroyed and its inhabitants driven off. When they came back,

a second raid had the same result. Yet they returned, and stayed and rebuilt their homes and their lives. Houses now stand where other houses stood. On that entire frontier, no other settlement of such a size was destroyed and restored so completely. The story is clear and the meaning apparent. Cherry Valley is the embodiment of the cruelty of frontier war, and the resilience of the settlers who endured it.

Artists became aware of that story, and began to examine its elements. That they chose to borrow from it is to be expected. *What* they chose—the selection of which elements to include and which to discard—is an indicator of their judgment and the demands of the market place they inhabited: American popular culture.

The shift is not merely one of generation, but of artistic mode. The preceding authors and artists were working from a literal form of representation. Their motives were direct and apparent. From now on, the forms are artistic and are grounded as much or more in personal ambition or personal enrichment. Wealth and fame are the subtexts of the works that follow, and not simply regional, national or filial piety. As well, the increasing complexity of these works—the long form of the novel, or series fiction, and the risks and rewards of the motion picture business—are of greater importance in understanding how they were shaped. Prior to this point, nearly every work considered has been that of an amateur, however well intentioned or gifted, working to please himself above all.

Now the professionals are taking over, and the marketplace is the arbiter. The veneer of professionalism and entrepreneurship, however, often masks individuals with the same personal needs as the amateurs. The fact that more is at stake only leads them farther afield. We will consider authors whose ambitions blinded them to the defects of their works, and moving picture makers who tried to pay their bills with art, or who fed their art with money, and succeeded with neither. They allowed personal needs to overwhelm artistic or economic



judgment. Often their decisions were based not on art or business, but upon irrational impulses resulting in disaster.

This is the paradox: that the naïve or amateur works tend to be the ones that make the most successful attempt at honesty. Alonso Chappel is not a great artist, but his painting and engraving of the death of Jane Wells captures the essential truth of what happened at Cherry Valley more successfully than most of the far more famous visual artists who followed him.

Instead, it is the ambitious professional striving after fame or success who falters, whose story is a cautionary tale of what happens to artists who suppose themselves superior to their subject. The story of that misstep is the significant story, not the garbled version of the story that we already know. It is not enough to report the error. By unraveling the author's intention and his methods, and his success or failure, we gain an insight into how American popular culture worked in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Chapter Four: Harold Frederic: *In the Valley*, 1890

*Today the reputation of Harold Frederic is that of a fine, neglected regional novelist whose career was cut short by a premature death. His promise is fulfilled in his later work, particularly in his realistic novel about the conflict of faith and modernism, The Damnation of Theron Ware. On that basis, the fact that Frederic was to be the first serious artist to attempt to treat the conflict in the Mohawk Valley, incorporating much of the matter of Cherry Valley, promises much. He was a local man who knew the descendants of the actual heroic generation. He was a thoughtful man who correctly saw social forces and tensions larger than King vs. Congress at work. He would attempt to expand the bounds of the historical novel through that knowledge and consciousness.*

*Based on his later work, Frederic was capable of treating serious matters in a realistic manner. Had he done so; had he trusted his own gift as far he would in his later work, he might have written a better book than he actually did. Instead, he trusted another man's gift more than his own, without fully understanding it, and he trusted a market for which he had little more than contempt.*

One of the gratifying aspects of the 1878 centennial was the interest taken by the press; the Albany and New York press was represented as well as the county papers. The three leading newspapers of Utica sent representatives; one of them may have been a young reporter named Harold Frederic.<sup>111</sup> There Horatio Seymour said:

Alas, for the dwellers in the valley of the Mohawk! The graves of their fathers are unmarked, and its history, surpassing in dramatic interest the inventions of romance, is fading from the memories of those who enjoy the fruits of their toils and sufferings.<sup>112</sup>

Harold Frederic took those words as a marching order.

Jonathan Miller's *Subsequent Performances*, a book about theatrical and artistic revivals, and the futility of period recreation, begins with an anecdote about the completion of a

French medieval cathedral in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The greatest care was taken to reproduce the style of the completed portion, and to use the identical materials, suitably aged. The result was then declared indistinguishable from the older part of the church. The result is now an obvious pastiche of 19<sup>th</sup> century faux-medieval style. “. . . the artist can not avoid seeing the past with the eyes of the present . . .” Miller’s point is that every creation is the result of its own time. We may use period instruments and period arrangements; we may use period staging and period costumes, but we deceive ourselves to think that we can reproduce past art. We can only produce modern art.<sup>113</sup>

The modern historical novel has had a disorderly course. Its first age, exemplified by the works of Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper, was still anchored in the romances from which it arose. The novels are story-driven and sensation-driven. Characters are the playthings of the author and his plots, and you cannot read them for very long without feeling the need to flesh out unrealized characters with emotions and motivations, which may have been part of their original appeal.

These very popular novels were followed by books that reflected an age of increasing psychological awareness. Character came to be one of the most important aspects of serious fiction. The English novel that exemplifies this, and became the standard of historical fiction for its time was William Makepeace Thackeray’s *History of Henry Esmond*. Esmond, the hero and third person narrator of his own story, is as complex and troubled a character as any in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction. Born on the wrong side of the blanket of a great English family, he strives to serve that family with more loyalty than it deserves; a metaphor for the loyalty to the Stuarts after their deposition in 1688.

Like them, his loyalty is ultimately based in selfish personal motives. Esmond sees this in time; he is unable to help the Stuarts but he can save himself from a futile life by

rejecting political ambition. Along the way, he reluctantly but skillfully involves himself in war, intrigue, and romance. As Walter Allen notes, “He is a Hamlet, but a Hamlet who *acts*, even though he constantly doubts the wisdom of his actions.”<sup>114</sup> At least the way he tells it, for he is the narrator of his own history. Thackeray admitted to a friend that he found his hero to be a prig and bore.<sup>115</sup> While *Vanity Fair* remains Thackeray’s best-known novel, *Henry Esmond* is regarded as his finest work in fiction, a sustained narrative driven by a psychologically complex antihero.

It is driven as well by a villain, a real person, the Satanic (in ambition as well as evil) Lord Mohun. One of the novel’s dramatic setpieces is a fictional precursor of the most famous duel in English history, in which Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton settled their political rivalry forever, not so much a duel as a brawl with swords, in which both men died. Thackeray fleshes the bare facts of the rivalry with a foreplot that shows Mohun’s charm, egoism and malevolence.

Peter Drake was an Irish adventurer and mercenary, a real contemporary of the fictitious Henry Esmond. He tells in his *Memoirs* of the morning he was in a lady’s chamber after a night’s carouse. That lady’s protector was now coming up the stairs to meet her. She tried to put her Lord off long enough for Drake to escape, but he disdained flight as not suited to the gentleman he thought himself to be. He went boldly down the stairs, meeting his rival mid way. That rival was the real Lord Mohun. For a moment, hands were ready to grasp the hilts of swords.

However, this morning Mohun was evidently starting to feel his age, and what was left from the night before, and he and Drake sat down together and had a badly needed eye-opener: two rakehells edging past their prime, changing the guard on a lady who was no lady.<sup>116</sup>

Historical novels, even the very best ones, tend to be about their own time, and not the one that they are set in. Thackeray created Becky Sharp--or at least got her down on paper--so he knew something about the demi-monde; born in 1811, he was just old enough to have seen her original in London, or during his travels in Europe. He made every effort to affect the style of writing of the age he chose for *Henry Esmond*, even to the point of printing the first edition in a deliberately archaic font. He could not change his way of thinking, however. Henry Esmond is a Regency, not a Restoration, gentleman; he reports correctly the lax manners and morals of his age but his own tend to rise towards those of Queen Victoria's. He loves a freethinking and ambitious woman, but when her rejection is final, he marries her servile and honorable mother. At the time, Thackeray's artifice was successful, and the novel was widely admired for recapturing a lost age. It is still admired, but that lost age is now clearly Victorian.

Thackeray skillfully embodied the stresses of Restoration England in the persons of his characters. Esmond pretends to be a straightforward hero, but like the Whigs who chose stability and order over honesty and a proper legal claim to the throne, he puts aside principle when it suits him. His cousin Beatrix, embodying Tory loyalty and unruliness, is morally lax but completely honest about her own failings and her cousin's—she is the only character who sees through Esmond's pose to the selfish egoism beneath. She loses in the end, but she is Thackeray, protesting against his priggish, boring hero. *Henry Esmond* is a historical romance, but it is also a psychological anti-romance, in which the tensions between ideals and action, morality and honesty leave a sense of unease long after the conventional resolution of the plot.

*Henry Esmond* was the model for the novel that Harold Frederic planned to write about the Revolution in upstate New York. The problem with such a model is that it must

be understood in its entirety, and then put aside, before any original work can be done.

Frederic's mistake was to take the bare synopsis and use it as a blueprint.

Harold Frederic was born in 1856, four years after the publication of *Henry Esmond*, in Utica, New York. A short distance to the west was the Oriskany battlefield, where half the Mohawk Valley militia died in an afternoon, fighting Tories and Iroquois. Twice that distance north was West Canada Creek, where Walter Butler died. The first half of Frederic's short life was spent in the valley, his ambition moving him east to Albany, editing a newspaper, then south to work for the *New York Times*. He became that paper's London correspondent, and it was in London that he wrote his novel about the Revolution, *In the Valley*, from 1886 to 1889.

Its roots were in the articles he wrote commemorating the Oriskany Centennial in 1877<sup>117</sup>, in his love for the country he had grown up in, and the wish to honor the heroism and sacrifice of his Dutch and German forebears who had settled the wilderness of upstate New York. Historians like John Fiske and Timothy Dwight had turned the Revolutionary War into a New England Iliad. New England's war had begun in April 1775 at Lexington and ended in March of 1776 with the evacuation of Boston. Other than coastal raids, they had spent the war in relative peace and security, turning out en masse to repel Burgoyne's Invasion of New York from Canada in 1777, and safe thereafter from any serious threat of invasion.

The Mohawk Valley had endured invasions and raids from 1777 to 1782. 800 militiamen had turned out to repel St. Leger's invasion from the west and half of them had died in a single afternoon at Oriskany. Thereafter the remnants of the militia had to defend a hundred miles of isolated settlements against Tory and Iroquois raiders, often without success, and nearly always without support from the state or national government. To the

New Englanders, the largely German and Dutch farmers of the Mohawk Valley were crude rustics, speaking foreign languages, hardly worthy of the name American. The Ulster Scots among them, like those who settled Cherry Valley, were little better, speaking English but with a rude accent, and worshipping a savage Presbyterian God.

Frederic believed that his section and his forebears deserved as much fame as New England. He thought that there was a story worth telling and began collecting research. He brought it with him to England and began writing. By 1886 he could write to a friend:

. . . I shall come back to America in 1887 with some money, with a reputation, and with the manuscript of a second story—the Mohawk Valley romance, which I began five years ago—in such shape that two months' pointing up on the ground will make it into American literature what *Henry Esmond* is in English. Then I need never, please God, ask what time a paper goes to press again.<sup>118</sup>

Frederic's ambitions were artistic and financial. The story's quality would be up to him; its success was up to the market. The common belief then was that women accounted for most novel sales—four fifths of all sales according to the embittered John W. DeForest, writing to William Dean Howells in 1879:

I don't understand why you and I haven't sold monstrously except on the theory that our novel-reading public is mainly a female or a very juvenile public, and wants something nearer to its own mark of intellect and taste.<sup>119</sup>

Like *Esmond*, the narrator is the hero. Douw Mauverensen is a widow's son, taken into the household of a friendly bachelor, Thomas Stewart, an old Jacobite in exile among the rustics of the Mohawk Valley. Several veiled hints imply that Mr. Stewart comes from an illustrious family, but from the wrong side of the blanket, and he is welcome into the homes of the gentry, chief of whom is Sir William Johnson, the affable head of the Indian Department and font of patronage in the valley. Stewart also takes into his household a young German girl, orphaned in one

of the French raids that open the novel in the year 1757. Desideria, called Daisy, grows up with Douw, who comes to think of her as more than a sister.

Into their lives comes Philip Cross, the son of Mr. Stewart's gentleman friend from England. The glamour of his setting in the high society of Albany and the valley turns Daisy's head. Douw, disgusted, leaves the valley and enters the fur trade. His moderate success as a factor further distances him from Mr. Stewart and the Crosses, who regard trade as something unfitting to a gentleman. In the midst of the agitation of the colonies for more self-rule, Sir William Johnson dies suddenly and the Mohawk Valley erupts into a battle for power in his absence. The parties mirror the wider struggle. The Whigs, the lower and middle classes, seek to expend power to themselves. The Tories, the old power structure, seek to preserve their power and stifle dissent against the old regime.

Douw joins the Whigs, who soon call themselves Patriots. Their superior organization drives the Tories from the valley. Their women remain, and Douw protects Daisy Cross from retaliation and insult. She confides to him that her marriage is unhappy, made so by her husband's arrogance and dissipation. Power in the valley devolves to the old Palatine German and Dutch families, chief of whom is the militia general Nicholas Herkimer, a homely old gentleman, barely literate in English, but of deep moral authority. Douw's own stature in the valley rises as an aide to the patrician patriot Philip Schuyler, who sends him to help raise the valley militia to resist the invasion from Niagara of the Tories and Iroquois. Herkimer leads the valley men to relieve the beleaguered Fort Stanwix, but some of his officers believe he is too cautious, or even treacherous—like most of the valley families, he has relatives serving with the Tories—and they force a counsel of war



that sends the militia forward into an ambush. Half of them are killed, but the survivors stand their ground and it is the Iroquois and Tories who retreat, allowing the militia to bring off their wounded and return to the valley. One of those is Philip Cross, a Tory officer, found by Douw, severely wounded. Out of a perverse sense of honor Douw has his wounds tended and takes him back to his wife, but within sight of his home Cross dies in a grotesque accident. Honor satisfied, Douw is free in time to marry the willing Daisy and the novel ends.<sup>120</sup>

Emulating his model, Frederic titled his finished work *Douw Mauverensen* and sent it to Scribner's. After politely suggesting a change in title, Scribner's published it in serial form in their magazine and then in novel form in 1890. Twice reprinted, its modest success did not free Frederic from the call for press time. Neither did its critical success.

Praised for its loving recreation of the lost world of the Mohawk, critics noted that *In the Valley's* characterizations never seemed to come to life, with the exception of the narrator. It is a fair criticism, and the kind that comes to most novelists learning their craft. The story is compelling and simply told, the background detailed and interesting, but the woman who is the object of his ambition, and the men who bar its way, never seem to be more than the sum of their roles. In that sense, it may be a victim of the genre and its market. Leaving a character incomplete may allow the reader to complete it for himself. The longed for Daisy can be yours and not Frederic's. One criticism of *Henry Esmond* is that the novel is so complete that it leaves nothing for the reader to do but admire; there is nothing you can bring to it. Admirable but untouchable, you cannot own it.

Frederic's most interesting insights are not those of character but society and

history. He regards the Revolution as a class struggle more than a war of ideas, or good versus evil. His hero Douw is representative of the class that seeks to rise through work and character, rather than building upon privilege or achieving patronage. The great patron of the valley Sir William Johnson is shown to be a man who rose from modest circumstances through hard work and genius. The truly great are not born great, but earn esteem by actions and character. Even the patroon Philip Schuyler earns his greatness by surpassing the limits of birth and wealth by extending himself to be a leader and servant of the new American nation.

The enemies of that nation, Douw's enemies, are political or social reactionaries. Excessively proud of birth or recklessly brave, they never seem to serve any cause other than their egoism, despite their talk about respect for the King, or their contempt for the masses. While the antagonist Philip Cross is fictional, he is a member of a real faction populated with real characters. The best among them, Douw's patron, Thomas Stewart, responds to the Revolution by withdrawing into the past on his way into senescence. The others, Johnson's heirs and dependents, fight the rebels and each other for the spoils of power available in wartime. They are not wicked, but limited; they fail to see the possibilities now available to them as citizens of a new world. One of them is Walter Butler.

. . . and of him I ought to speak more closely, since long generations after this tale is forgotten his name will remain written, blood-red, in the Valley's chronicles. . . . I always liked Walter: even now, despite everything, there continues a soft spot in my memory for him. . . . He was about my own age, and, oh! such a handsome youth, with features cut as in a cameo, and pale-brown smooth skin, and large deep eyes, that look upon me still sometimes in dreams with ineffable melancholy. He was somewhat beneath my stature, but formed with perfect delicacy. Walter Butler was most perfectly built--a living picture of grace. He dressed, too, with remarkable taste, contriving always to appear the gentleman, yet not out of place in the wilderness. He wore his own black hair, carelessly tied

or flowing, and with no thought of powder.

We had always liked each other, doubtless in that we were both of a solemn and meditative nature. We had not much else in common, it is true, for he was filled to the nostrils with pride about the Ormond-Butlers, whom he held to be his ancestors, and took it rather hard that I should not also be able to revere them for upholding a false-tongued king against the rights of his people. For my own part, I did not pin much faith upon his descent, being able to remember his grandfather, the old lieutenant, who seemed a peasant to the marrow of his bones.

Nor could I see any special value in the fact of descent, even were it unquestioned. Walter, it seemed to me, would do much better to work at the law, to which he was bred, and make a name for himself by his own exertions. Alas, he did make a name!<sup>121</sup>

At a formal dinner, Butler rebukes an Englishman speaking calmly of the coming conflict.

Do we not know the canters? Oh, but I'd smash through letter and seal of the law alike to get at them, were I in power! There'll be no peace till some strong hand does do it. . . Ah, yes, *you* can keep cool! There are thousands of miles of water between you English and the nest where this treason is hatched. It's close to us. Do you think you can fence in a sentiment as you can cattle? No: it will spread. Soon what is shouted in Boston will be spoken in Albany, whispered in Philadelphia, winked and nodded in Williamsburg, thought in Charleston. And how will it be here, with us? Let me tell you, Mr. Cross, we are really in an alien country here. The high Germans above us, like that Herkimer you saw here Tuesday, do you think they care a pistareen for the King? And these damned sour-faced Dutch traders below, have they forgotten that this province was their grandfathers'? The moment it becomes clear to their niggard souls that there's no money to be lost by treason, will they not delight to help on any trouble the Yankees contrive to make for England? I tell you, sir, if you knew these Dutch as I know them--their silent treachery, their jealousy of us, their greed--"<sup>122</sup>

Douw quietly reminds him that he is Dutch as well; Butler politely silences himself.

Frederic's characterization is a fleshing out of the bare bones of a reputation and a few letters— nine in total— left surviving in archives. His speech is Frederic's, as is his picture; no image survived, and no description. Frederic created this Irish Hotspur. At the novel's end, Douw leaves an epitaph for Walter Butler:

There was still another raid upon the Valley the ensuing year, but it touched us only in that it brought news of the violent death of Walter Butler, slain on the bank of the East Canada Creek by the Oneida chief Skenandoah. Both Daisy and I had known him from childhood, and had in the old times been fond of him. Yet there had been so much innocent blood upon those delicate hands of his, before they clutched the gravel on the lonely forest stream's edge in their death-grasp, that we could scarcely wish him alive again.<sup>123</sup>

The tone is one of near-regret, acknowledging the former virtues of a fallen angel—but the fall is acknowledged as well. Frederic portrays the Revolutionary War in the Mohawk Valley as a civil war, fought by former friends and neighbors; he had the advantage of recent history to apply to his understanding of civil war. When he describes Butler he could be describing a cavalier of a more recent Lost Cause, doomed by history and rightly so, but with traces of grandeur remaining.

The Civil War may have also had another effect on the novel. *Henry Esmond* is the autobiography of a soldier, but there is little fighting in it; the campaigns described are more political than military. Douw Mauverensen takes part in two battles. The failed attack on Quebec is a confused struggle in a blizzard, and Douw is wounded in the first few minutes of the attack. The battle of Oriskany is another matter. Frederic had researched it for the centennial ceremony; adding the journalism of the Civil War to the accounts of the battle, with details of frontier conflict found elsewhere, he was able to create a realistic, graphic description of a horrific battle. He begins describing the forces, carefully listing them in the manner of an epic.

It was the first time that the whole Tryon militia had been gathered together, and we looked one another over with curiosity. Though called into common action by a common peril, the nearness of which made the Mohawk Valley seem a very small place and its people all close neighbors, the men assembled here represented the partial settlement of a country larger than any one of several European monarchies. As there were all sorts and grades of dress, ranging from the spruce blue and buff of some of the officers, through the gray homespun and linsey-woolsey

of the farmer privates, to the buckskin of the trappers and huntsmen, so there were all manner of weapons, all styles of head-gear and equipment, all fashions of faces. There were Germans of half a dozen different types, there were Dutch, there were Irish and Scotch Presbyterians, there were stray French Huguenots, and even Englishmen, and here and there a Yankee settler from New England. Many there were who with difficulty understood each other, as when the Scotch Campbells and Clydes of Cherry Valley, for example, essayed to talk with the bush-Germans from above Zimmerman's. . . Whole households of strong men marched together. There were nine Snells, all relatives, in the patriot ranks; so far as I can remember, there were five Bellingers, five Seebers, five Wagners, and five Wollovers--and it may well be five of more than one other family.<sup>124</sup>

To a contemporary culture celebrating the primacy of the Anglo-Saxon, Frederic presents his list of heroes, and invites his readers to find one. English is not yet an official language, but Americans who may speak it imperfectly if at all somehow find a strong common bond. They march to relieve the besieged Fort Stanwix; a few miles from it, Nicholas Herkimer waits for word from the fort. His colonels decry his caution and demand he press on at once. His gives in to them; they march forward into an ambush. In the first ten minutes of fighting nearly half the militia is killed or wounded, and the rest fight for their lives against an unseen enemy.

An hour ago it had been so softly peaceful, with the little brook picking its clean way in the sunlight through the morass, and the kingfisher flitting among the willows, and the bees' drone laying like a spell of indolence upon the heated air. Now the swale was choked with corpses! The rivulet ran red with blood, and sluggishly spread its current around barriers of dead men. Bullets whistled across the gulf, cutting off boughs of trees as with a knife, and scattering tufts of leaves like feathers from a hawk stricken in its flight. The heavy air grew thick with smoke, dashed by swift streaks of dancing flame. The demon-like screams of the savages, the shouts and moans and curses of our own men, made hearing horrible. . . . A frightened owl, I remember, was routed by the tumult from its sleepy perch, and flew slowly over the open space of the ravine. So curious a compound is man--we watched the great brown-winged creature flap its purblind way across from wood to wood, and speculated there, as we stood in the jaws of death, if some random ball would hit it.<sup>125</sup>

The strange contrast of the immediacy of death in battle with the dreamlike vision of something outside of the battle being noted is now a staple of war writing. It was less so then, and seems to derive from the personal accounts of Civil War battles.

It was for the historical recreation of the time and place—what in film is called *mise en scene*—that Frederic received credit in otherwise ordinary reviews, even from friends like William Dean Howells. He had fulfilled his ambition of making use of the material gathered so carefully, and of paying tribute to his home ground. If he was unable to equal *Henry Esmond* in critical or financial esteem, his shade may be consoled in that they are at last equal in obscurity.

*In the Valley's* main failing is in not attaining the standard set for characterization set by Frederic himself in his later work *The Damnation of Theron Ware*, a realistic contemporary novel of ideas and character and his greatest success, critical and financial. *In the Valley* began with a history and a wish to honor it. With these rubrics, he had to create characters to fit his thesis. *Theron Ware* is a novel about a minister who believes one thing until his belief is challenged by friends, a man and a woman, who believe in other things. The challenge does not destroy Ware, it only forces him to see his mediocrity. Frederic's only goal in this was to create a realistic portrait of a certain kind of man.

Perhaps you have to do a lot of bad writing before you can do any good writing; Frederic was at least able to produce one novel that remains in the canon before his death at the age of forty-two.

*However far Frederic fell short from his ambitions for In The Valley, it remains a more substantial work than most of its contemporary novels; he had too much skill to write a bad book. Its success was stronger and more influential among the educated class of reader. The number of*

*serious American authors and books at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was not large, and Frederic was one of them. Nor was his ambition singular; his contemporary Stephen Crane was outlining a similar historical novel at the time of his own premature death.*

*Frederic placed the matter of the New York Frontier war, and one of the main protagonists of the matter of Cherry Valley, into the intellectual thoroughfare. He established the outline of the story for authors to come: a romance of ambition; an outline to adopt or to reject. The other two threads of the story, the fall of the Iroquois, the passive endurance of the settlers, were put aside.*

## Chapter Five: Robert W. Chambers, 1901-1921

*The most important and influential author of all now appears. It was Robert W. Chambers who took up the theme created by Harold Frederic, and who established the story of Walter Butler and Cherry Valley—in that order and importance, for in his writing Cherry Valley was merely the venue where Walter Butler enacted the scene of his immortal infamy. Chambers was the journeyman who took the materials left by a better artist and reused them, and licensed their further use by other artists, most of them unaware that Harold Frederic had ever lived.*

There are certain novelists whose phenomenal popularity challenges us, almost like a blow to the face, and demands an explanation. Robert W. Chambers is a case in point. — Frederic Taber Cooper<sup>126</sup>

If Mr. Chambers thoroughly deserves to be called the prince of wholesale and cheap illusion, of commercialized darkness and flippant immorality in American fiction, if he gets the highest current prices for literary lies and extravagant frivolity based on false social distinction and exclusively patrician ideals; if continually he assumes more than he proves, and alternatively professes the most inconsequent triviality in his treatment of contemporary life and a pose of a social reformer of society from the inside, who satirizes what he exploits; then it is small wonder that a comparatively large and unsophisticated section of the reading public, who still buy and read his books are at a loss just where and how to place him.— John Curtis Underwood<sup>127</sup>

You should not let the reviews bother you; they count for very little in this country. — Robert W. Chambers<sup>128</sup>

One hundred published books in forty-four years; add to that the uncollected short stories, a book of poetry, *With the Band*, published in 1896, *The Witch of Ellangowan*, produced at Augustin Daly's Theatre the next year, starring Ada Rehan, and the 1913 musical comedy *Iole* adopted from his 1905 novel. Seven of those books were published posthumously, a record surpassing even Ernest Hemingway's. Twenty-five of these books were adopted into movies. Four were among the top ten best sellers for their respective years: *The Fighting Chance* in 1906, *The Younger Set* in 1907, *The Common Law* in 1911 and *In Secret* in 1919.



He was born in Brooklyn in 1865, the son of a prominent lawyer. After his graduation from Brooklyn Polytechnic, he joined the New York Art Student's League in 1885; a year later he went to Paris, to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and the Académie Julian. By 1889 his work was being displayed at the Paris Salon. He spent his days improving his painting; at night he wrote up notes about observations and remarks of the day. He returned to New York in 1893.

Chambers became a popular magazine illustrator. With his friend and competitor Charles Dana Gibson, he created the popular image of the "New Woman" of the turn of the century; the "Gibson Girl" was once called the "Chambers Girl". A year after his return, he published *In the Quarter*, a collection of stories of Bohemian life in Paris. From then until after his death, he was to publish at least one book a year for the next 44 years.<sup>129</sup>

Chambers' reputation survives today for his early work in horror and fantasy. In that genre he is regarded as the most important author between Poe and Lovecraft, and that opinion rests largely on one book of stories, *The King in Yellow*. The title work is a play; the stories are about the people who read it, all of whom are driven mad by the experience. Chambers' advocates are quick to point out that this is the premise behind the popular Japanese horror film *Ringu*, and its American remake *The Ring*, except the work in question is a video tape.

His knowledge of the literary market led him to branch out into other genres; he was soon writing societal and historical novels. After four novels about various adventures of the Franco-Prussian War he turned to American history, that of the New York Revolutionary frontier.

The novels run like this:

	<i>Published</i>	<i>Set in</i>
<i>Cardigan</i>	1901	1774--1775
<i>The Maid at Arms</i>	1902	1777
<i>The Reckoning</i>	1907	1781
<i>The Hidden Children</i>	1914	1779
<i>The Little Red Foot</i>	1921	1774—1780

In their entirety, they cover the entire course of the Revolutionary War. The first, *Cardigan*, gave its name to the series, although the hero Michael Cardigan appears in no other work. Rather, like Scott's *Waverley* novels, the first gives its name to series of books with similar settings and themes.

Those who read this romance for the sake of what history it may contain will find that the histories from which I have helped myself more profitable.

Those antiquarians who hunt their hobbies through books had best drop the trail of this book at the preface, for they will draw but a blank covert in these pages. Better for the antiquarian that he seek the mansion of Sir William Johnson, which is still standing in Johnstown, New York, and see with his own eyes the hatchet-scars in the solid mahogany banisters where Thayendanegea hacked out polished chips. It would doubtless prove more profitable for the antiquarian to thumb those hatchet-marks than these pages.

But there be simple folk who read romance for its own useless sake.

To such quiet minds, innocent and disinterested, I have some little confidences to impart: There are still trout in the Kenneyetto; the wild ducks still splash on the Vlaie, where Sir William awoke the echoes with his flintlock; the spot where his hunting-box stood is still called Summer-House Point; and huge pike in golden-green chain-mail still haunt the dark depths of the Vlaie water, even on this fair April day in the year of our Lord 1900.

The Author<sup>130</sup>

The main plot of *Cardigan* begins with the two wards of a Mohawk Valley magnate. He is attracted to her, she is attracted to high society; the young man vows to earn her or to make her regret her rejection of him. Historical forces clash; the young man rises and after the experience of history, they are reunited. The similarity of *Cardigan's* plot to the plot of *In the Valley*, as well as its setting, may not have been

an accident. *In the Valley* was a minor success, and *Cardigan* sold much better; as far as the popular taste determined success, Chambers was on the right track. He wrote much more about the high society; his heroine was more of a coquette and his hero had a far more dramatic career among the upper crust than did Douw Mauverensen. There are more speeches in *Cardigan*, more incidents and action, but the speeches are contrived and stagy, or advance plot more than character; the action is melodramatic and personal. Battles occur, but the real action comes when two sworn enemies meet finally. Confrontations and encounters are also plot driven; nothing ever seems to just happen, but must move the plot along. Chambers learned, before Elmore Leonard, to leave out the parts that no one reads anyway.

However, the plot does move. Something is always happening to move the reader along to turn just one more page—a necessary skill of the popular novelist. Another skill was stated by Rebecca West: “One does not ride the tosh horse with tongue in cheek.” Chambers had already reached the point of professionalism that demands complete awareness of the audience and its needs. He never creates an expectation that is not satisfied. From the first disputatious meeting of the pretty wards of Sir William Johnson, you know that the expectation of their love and reconciliation will be met. From the first description of the bad feeling that exists between the sixteen-year-old *Cardigan* and his tutor, Sir William’s secretary, you know that they will be foils for each other throughout the novel.

That secretary is Captain Walter Butler: “. . . a gentleman and an officer of rank and fortune, whose degraded whims led him now to instruct youth as a pastime . . .”<sup>131</sup> A lesson lasting long enough to show *Cardigan*’s spirit and Butler’s contempt is ended by Sir William.

Mr. Butler retired, leaving the door swinging. Out in the dark hallway I fancied I could still see his shallow eyes shining. I may have been mistaken. But all men know now that Walter Butler hath eyes that see as well by dark as by the light of the sun; and none know it so well as the people of New York province and of Tryon County.<sup>132</sup>

Michael's daydream a dozen pages on has a visitor:

Then, unbidden, the apparition of Mr. Butler rose into my vain dreaming, and, though I am no prophet, nor can I claim the gift of seeing behind the veil, yet I swear that Walter Butler appeared to me all aflame and bloody with scalps bunched at his girdle—*and the scalps were not of the red men!*<sup>133</sup>

Awakened from his reverie, he is called to dinner by the same Captain Butler.

Angered by his manner, Cardigan insults him; reminded that a youth may offer insults that a man may not, Cardigan invites satisfaction. Butler demurs:

“Not your blood . . . not the blood of a boy. That would rust my honour.

Wait, Master Cardigan, wait a bit. A year runs like a spotted fawn in cherry-time!”<sup>134</sup>

It is less than a year that passes before they meet again. Michael Cardigan is a messenger for Sir William, meeting frontier magnates like Lord Dunmore of Virginia, embroiled in the imminent conflict between the colonists and their overlords. Sir William seeks to keep the Iroquois neutral in any war; Dunmore wants to bring them in on the side of the King. His agent in this is Walter Butler, Sir William's trusted agent. Butler's double-dealing is revealed by a drunken Dunmore, and he is banished. Cardigan exults, knowing that Butler's designs on Sir William's ward Felicity Warren, nicknamed “Silver Heels,” are now foiled, and his own designs furthered. In the midst of this, Sir William warns him that the wishes of individuals will have little force in the coming war. Cardigan may have to take a side that destroys his private happiness.

Soon after this, Sir William dies and Cardigan embarks on a series of missions and

adventures in the months of crisis preceding the outbreak of armed rebellion. He spends much of that time among the hardy frontiersmen whose sympathies are with the rebels; before long, Cardigan's are as well. He meets the leaders of the rebellion; men like Patrick Henry, and finds them better men than the royalists he serves.

Cardigan also finds time to pursue his ladylove Silver Heels, and finds himself crossed by two of the many who also pursue her, the dissolute Lord Dunmore and the far more capable Captain Butler. His ballroom encounter with Walter Butler leaves the captain with “. . . the breaking of an arm, collar-bone and many ribs,”<sup>135</sup> which removes him from the story until page 465, at Cardigan's mercy, discussing their mutual fiancé:

“This is not your quarrel!” he (Butler) said, desperately “this woman is the daughter of Cade Renard, a notorious highwayman known as the Weasel! I doubt that Sir Michael Cardigan—for your uncle is dead, whether you know it or not!—would care to claim kinship in this house!”<sup>136</sup>

Which would seem to make Felicity “Silver Heels” Warren the daughter of “The Weasel.”

“But she is not, sir!” cried Foxcroft . . . she is Captain Warren's own child . . . I have letters here to prove it!” he said, slapping the flaps of his brass-buttoned coat. . . . I can prove that Walter Butler was the forger! I can prove that Sir John Johnson knew it! And to that end Sir John and Captain Butler conspired to make her believe herself to be the child of a half-crazed forest-runner who had been besetting Sir John with his mad importunities, calling himself Cade Renard, and vowing that Miss Warren was his own child!”<sup>137</sup>

Cardigan's friends urge the hanging of Butler; he demurs, offering instead to fight him in a duel, but Silver Heels reminds Cardigan that Butler is now a man without honor. It is April 13, 1775, the closest city is Boston and royal authority has all but collapsed. Cardigan is not a murderer and there is nothing else to do with Butler but let him go free.

So passed Walter Butler from among us, riding slowly out into the shadowy world, under the calm moon. God witness that I conducted as my honour urged, not as my hot blood desired—and He shall deal with me on day, face to face, that I let loose this man on the world, yet did not dream of the hell he should make of Tryon County ere his red soul was fled again to the hell that hatched it!

So rode forth mine enemy, Walter Butler, invulnerable for me in his armour of dishonour, unpunished for the woe that he had wrought, unmarked by justice which the dawn had not yet roused from her long sleep in chains.

Again Mount raised his rifle.

“No,” I said.<sup>138</sup>

The war begins, the novel ends. Cardigan, the narrator, relates just enough of the intervening story to let us know that he and Miss Warren found happiness and long life together.

Considered as a novel, *Cardigan* is floridly overwritten, compared to a more realistic romance like *In the Valley*. Its proper genre may have been literally prose melodrama, a visual entertainment elaborately described. In such a work, there is little need to create a main character; that character is *you*; *you* sent back in time in a dramatically promising situation, and in love, or the object of the hero’s love. The appeal of a novel like *Cardigan* is that it allows the reader vicarious stardom and vicarious romance—and vicarious villainy.

People like Mr. Cooper and Mr. Underwood, previously quoted, saw Chambers—or more properly, his audience—as a problem. They had some hopes that a literate public might find their way to improving books worthy of notice; fiction examining the particulars of the American experience. Instead of reading Frank Norris or Stephen Crane about the modern American dilemma, or Edith Wharton about the real working of society, they consume Winston Churchill, Owen Wister and Gene Stratton Porter.

Critics then and now try to analyze the taste of the public when it does not agree with their consensus of what they should be reading. Looking at Chambers seems to have driven Mr. Underwood into a frenzy of invective, but there’s a real question within: who

reads this junk and why? The answer is, people who do not take literature seriously, who see it as distraction rather than discipline. Ten hours in a workshop or on a sales floor is all the discipline you need in a day.

Melodrama is also the basis of the character of Walter Butler in this novel. Aside from the future fact of his being present at a bloody incident of the Revolution, nothing about this character is remotely factual. His roots are not in the histories described earlier, but in *The Count of Monte Cristo*'s villainous Fernand Mondego. Butler's reputation at this time was regional, upstate New York, especially in the Mohawk Valley where Chambers had his roots and would restore his ancestral home. It may be that Chambers was attracted to Butler by Harold Frederic's earlier use of him to illustrate a type of character of the time. Frederic used Walter Butler to display the reactionary state of mind of the Loyalist placeman, but gave him no active role in the action of the novel. Unlike Frederic's Butler, Chambers' Butler is an active antagonist plotting against the happiness of the hero and nearly succeeding.

Butler is described in such a way as to leave no mistake of his evil nature:

Besides, there was Mr. Butler with his silent, deathly laugh—a laugh that never reached his eyes—yellow, changeless eyes, round as a bird's. *p.5*

Out in the dark hallway I fancied I could see his shallow eyes shining. *p.6*

"I heard nothing, sir," said I, giving him a surly look, which he returned with that blank stare of the eyes, noticeable in hawks and kites and foul night birds surprised by light. *p.20*

. . . Butler stood confronting us, his blank eyes traveling from one to another, his thin lips twitching in an ever-deepening sneer. *p.465*

He sounds sinister:

"You know me, sir?" replied Butler, without the faintest trace of surprise in his colourless voice. *p.155*

He may be a vampire:

... balancing his thin hand on the hilt of his small-sword, walked noiselessly into the dim ballroom. *p.303*

“Lies!” muttered Butler, between ashen lips. His cheeks became loose and horrible; his lips shriveled up above his teeth. *p.467*

Butler was sitting forward in his chair, his bloodless face supported between his slim fingers, his eyes on vacancy. *p.469*

It is a commonplace that Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is a metaphor for unspeakable sexual desire, and that the vampire’s appearance is closer to the Victorian image of the sexual degenerate, than it is to the actual historical Vlad, a man whose only portrait shows an alarmingly robust appearance. Butler’s attempt to marry Silver Heels is a similar anachronism; rakes of that age were far closer to Richardson’s Lovelace and de Laclos’ Merteuil, more interested in the chase and the kill, indifferent to what remained.

Yet he has the virtue of courage:

The man’s careless self-possession was marvelous considering he was facing the man he had so vilely betrayed. *p.117*

Courage is the only virtue allowed many villains; it enhances the hero’s courage to defeat a brave man. Chambers was not through with Butler, however, and the portrait was to receive further shadings the next year. He worked on several projects at once, the secret of his productivity, and the notes for *Cardigan* served for *The Maid at Arms* as well.

*The Maid at Arms* is the story of George Ormond, a descendant of the Jacobite Duke of Ormond, who arrives in the Mohawk Valley, from his home in British Florida, in 1777. He meets well-born relatives and falls in love with his cousin Dorothy Varrick. At an aristocratic banquet, he meets most of the Mohawk Valley gentry, including Walter Butler. Again, Butler’s appearance is his foreshadow.

... I turned curiously, to see a dark graceful young man enter and stand for a moment staring haughtily straight at me. He wore a very elegant black-and-orange uniform, without gorget; a black military cloak hung from



his shoulders, caught up in his sword-knot . . . I saw on his gauntlets of fine doeskin the Ormond arms, heavily embroidered. Instantly the affectation displeased me.

. . . He came, lightly as a panther, his dark, well-cut features softening a trifle; and I thought him handsome in his uniform, wearing his own dark hair unpowdered, tied in a short queue; but when he turned full face to greet Sir George Covert, I was astonished to see the cruelty in his almost perfect features, which were smooth as a woman's, and lighted by a pair of clear, dark-golden eyes.

Ah, those wonderful eyes of Walter Butler—everchanging eyes, now almost black, glimmering with ardent fire, now veiled and amber, now suddenly a shallow yellow, round, staring, blank as the eyes of a caged eagle; and still again, piercing, glittering, narrowing to a slit. Terrible mad eyes, that I have never forgotten—never, never can forget.<sup>139</sup>

Butler displays a new and distasteful facet of his personality. He's a social climber.

As Sir Lupus named me, Walter Butler dropped Sir George's hand and grasped mine, too eagerly to please me.

"Ormond and Ormond-Butler need no friends to recommend them each to the other," he said. And straightaway fell a-talking of the greatness of the Arrans and the Ormonds, and of that duke who, attainted, fled to France to save his neck.

I strove to be civil, yet he embarrassed me before the others, babbling of petty matters interesting only to those whose taste invites them to go burrowing in parish records and ill-smelling volumes written by some toad-eater to his patron.

For me, I am an Ormond, and I know that it would be shameful if I turned rascal and besmirched my name. As to the rest—the dukes, the glory, the greatness—I hold it concerns nobody but the dead, and it is a foolishness to plague folks' ears by boasting of deeds done by those you never knew, like a Seminole chanting ere he strikes the painted post.

Also, this Captain Walter Butler was overlarding his phrases with "Cousin Ormond," so that I was soon cloyed, and nigh ready to damn the relationship to his face.<sup>140</sup>

The dinner proceeds and war talk begins. Despite his background, Ormond has rebel sympathies. He is appalled to hear that these gentlemen plan to bring the Iroquois to war against the rebel colonists.

But Walter Butler looked up from his gloomy meditation and raised his glass with a ghastly laugh. "I drink to our red allies," he said, slowly drained his glass till but a color remained in it, then dipped his finger in the dregs and drew upon the white tablecloth a blood-red cross.

"There's your clan-sign, you Campbells, you McDonalds," he said

with a terrifying smile that none could misinterpret.<sup>141</sup>

The party breaks up, battle lines drawn. Ormond's progress continues through the New York backcountry, and the nature writing that even Edmund Wilson admired.

Underfoot my shoes brushed through spikenard, and fell silently on carpets of moss-pinks, and once I saw a matted bed of late Mayflower, and the forest dusk grew sweeter and sweeter, saturating all the woodland, until each breath I drew seemed to intoxicate.<sup>142</sup>

Sterner matters intrude. At a council, the Iroquois are brought into the war, but the confederacy is broken by the efforts of Magdalen Brant a fictitious sister of Joseph Brant, whose eloquence brings the Oneida over to the rebels, and earns her the romantic esteem of Sir George Covert. Ormond participates in the Oriskany fight. Frederic's description is that of an engaged defender of his home ground and folk; Chambers' description, more detailed and anecdotal, is the story of a bystander among strangers whose names he knows, but whom he does not know.

In the aftermath, Ormond seeks out the British agents responsible for Indian raids. He intercepts a messenger with a bundle of scalps, and a letter to a British officer, based on the fictitious Captain Gerrish letter of 1782, but more lurid and grisly:

(1) One box of birch-bark containing an infant's scalp; very little hair, but well dried and cured. (I must ask full price for this.)<sup>143</sup>

Then he is free to find his cousin Dorothy and prepare a career of married bliss.

So far Chambers had used Butler as a peripheral villain, more for flavor than moving the direct action of the plot. He was shown advocating and driving the use of Iroquois against the rebel colonists—an act of great malevolence as seen by the other characters, most of whom, American and British, historically had done the same thing, and one of great potential drama and energy if portrayed, but only talked about in the two novels. That was

about to change. In 1905 Chambers published *The Reckoning*, and Butler was promoted from villainous second to main villain.

The novel's hero is Carus Renault, an American spy in British-occupied New York City, in the second half of 1781. His cover job as factotum to a great man gives him entry into the highest realms of New York society, which in this novel is considerably more glittering than one might expect in a garrison town on the losing side of a war now winding down. In this society, he meets and almost instantly falls in love with the noble ward of a British General, the Honourable Elsin Grey. By page 14, the fact that she has some dark secret involving marriage is plain. Twenty pages later, Walter Butler makes his entrance, literally, and his plan to lead the Iroquois in a war of annihilation in the Mohawk Valley is discussed. Renault and Butler are acquaintance-friends who have not met since the war began; Renault's old home in the Broadalbin Bush (Chambers' own home place) was burned by Butler's men.

Another old friend appears; The Weasel, feigned father to Silver Heels, but now a rogue for good, has joined the American spy company who carry Renault's intelligence to Washington's army.

At a lavish ball in New York, the characters reveal themselves. Butler and Elsin Grey seem to know each other better than Miss Grey would like others to know. Butler displays hitherto unknown depths of polish and ingratiation. Renault asks a question too many, and Butler disappears, returning shortly afterwards with an incriminating paper from Renault's own rooms, hidden in the paneling. Renault appears doomed, but Elsin Grey claims it as a jest of her own devising. Renault, now suspect, makes his escape to the American lines with Elsin Grey, who clearly reciprocates his feeling, but clearly cannot act upon them. Renault makes his report to Washington's adjutant, Colonel Hamilton, a young gentleman of

elegance and wit, who gives Renault his marching orders for the Mohawk to foil Butler's design.

In the course of doing his duty, and taking Elsin Grey to a place of safety until she can be transported across the lines to Canada and her guardian, Renault learns her secret. She is the wife, by clandestine marriage, of Walter Butler. She is too much a lady to be anything other than a dutiful wife to the man she now abhors. Renault burns, loving her more for her honorable conduct that cuts her off from him. He buries himself in duty, acting with the local rangers to split the Iroquois from their alliance with the British and foil Butler's great design. In doing so, he meets a young woman, mixed race Iroquois and French, Lyn Montour, who reveals that she is the wife of Walter Butler, and with priority.

Butler returns to claim his allies; Renault informs him of what has happened and what is known. The British and Tory raid falls on the Mohawk settlements, the militia repulses them and Renault leads the pursuit through the late autumn rain and snow. Though finely scrupulous in attempting to save his enemies' life, he is unable to prevent Butler's death. Renault and Elsin Grey are reunited.

In *The Reckoning*, Chambers combined two genres in which he had worked successfully, the historical and societal novels. He created an elaborate society in British occupied New York to allow him to show the sophisticated romantic byplay of Renault and Elsin Grey. He then moved this relationship to the New York frontier, the background of *Cardigan* and *The Maid-at-Arms*. There the romantic couple is contrasted to the homely rustics of the Mohawk; the British courtiers are contrasted to the equally polished but far more purposeful officers of Washington's army. Elsin Grey is contrasted with the equally attractive but earthier, near-feral Lyn Montour, whose first reaction on seeing Renault is to pull a knife.

Just as the societal novel in Chambers' hands is an excuse to show pretty people in pretty rooms, without the deeper contexts of an Edith Wharton, his use of history is just that of a forest backdrop, against which characters may exercise violent actions and desires. His hero Renault has a foot in both theatres, but he stands apart from both. In society, he has the rough edge of the honest man in disguise; Elsin Grey notes that he fails to wear his hair powdered on their first meeting. In the woods, he has the qualms of the gentleman, desiring to spare the life of the murderous Walter Butler. Killing him seems an act of self-interest, clearing his path to Elsin Grey, instead of disinterested patriotic duty.

Being not quite a gentleman, and not quite a frontiersman, leaves Renault not quite the hero. While he has the name of hero, his reservations stop him from taking timely action, prolonging the plot by delay and irresolution. It becomes necessary to move the plot along by using a villain who is resolute and immediate. Like a director calling upon a reliable character actor to provide that which the hero will not, Chambers retrieved Walter Butler from the secondary cast and gave him a leading role. As a villain, he gets to do everything that the hero cannot: express selfish ambition and violence, make love to as many women will hear him out, and in general allow the reader to wallow vicariously in as many vices as may be safely described in a novel written in 1905.

In doing so, Chambers crosses the line into full-blooded fiction. The Butler of the previous novels is an extension of the intelligent surmise begun by Harold Frederic, that of a borderland Hotspur, a relic of the colonial past to be admired, deplored and put away. The Butler of *The Reckoning* is a prime mover of policy and violence, with no counterpart in reality. The real Butlers of the Indian Department were single-mindedly engrossed in the enlargement of their property holdings. Political ambition had no place on the British frontier; decades of work resulted at best in a Lieutenant-Governorship of a million acres of

forest, its seat a cabin with a dirt floor.

Chambers wrote only one play among his great output, put off the theatre by the sudden death of his friend Augustin Daly. However, the theatre seems to have been an influence in his novel writing. He may also have fulfilling the need for theatre among that part of his audience deprived of anything more than the rare touring company. His dialogue is meant to be declaimed; his descriptions are directions for costumers and set designers, and his characters seldom rise above the standard theatrical “type.” Early on, the Hon.

Elsin Grey discusses with Carus Renault a mutual friend:

“Why, Mr. Renault, there is no more perfectly accomplished officer and gentleman than Walter Butler. I know him; I have danced with him at Quebec and at Niagara. How can even a rebel so slander him with those monstrous tales of massacre and torture and scalps taken from women and children at Cherry Valley?”

. . . And so I stood, smiling and silent, while she spoke of Walter Butler, describing him vividly, even to his amber black eyes and his pale face, and the poetic melancholy with which he clothed the hidden blood-lust that smoldered under his smooth pale skin. But there you have it— young, proud, and melancholy—and he had danced with her at Niagara, too, and—if I knew him—he had not spared her hints of that impetuous flame that burned for all pure women deep in the blackened pit of his own damned soul.

“Did you know his wife?” I asked, smiling.

“Walter Butler’s—wife!” she gasped, turning on me, white as death.<sup>144</sup>

Her description, which his evil-wisher agrees with, of a handsome, active man, attractive to women and to this woman, a man with dark hidden depths, and the mere mention (in jest) of his wife to a woman, who seems a sophisticated lady of the court, who nearly swoons at the thought. Add to it the spy’s orders to discover Butler’s secret plan to bathe the frontier in blood—an actor could not ask for a better entrance than to follow this; an entrance that is not to come for another thirty-four pages. At a society function in New York Renault crosses a lawn:

. . . and as I stepped from the shade out upon the sunny lawn the shadow of an advancing warned me, and I looked up to behold a young officer, in a black and green uniform, crossing my path, his head turned in my direction, his dark luminous gaze fastened curiously upon me.

Dazzled somewhat by the sun in my eyes, I peered at him as he passed, noting the strange cut of his regimentals, the silver buttons stamped with a motto in relief, the curious sword-knot of twisted buckthong heavily embroidered in silver and scarlet wampum. Wampum? And what was that devil's device flashing on button and shoulder-knot?

"Butler's Rangers!"

Slowly I turned to stare; he halted, looking back at me, a slim, graceful figure in forest-green, his own black hair gathered in a club, his dark amber eyes fixed on mine with that veiled yet detached glare I had not forgotten.

"Captain Butler," I said mechanically.

Hats in hand, heels together, we bowed low in the sunshine—so low that our hands on our hilts alone retained the blades in their scabbards, while our hats swept the short grass on the lawn; then, leisurely erect, once more we stood face to face, a yard of sod betwixt us, the sunshine etching our blue shadows motionless.

"Mr. Renault," he said, in that colorless voice he used at times, "I had thought to know you, but you are six years older. Time's alchemy"—he hesitated, then with a perfect bow—"refines even the noblest metal."<sup>145</sup>

The effect is pure theatre—the description of movement, gesture and costume are like stage directions for a play begging to be written and acted. Except that the actor willing to interrupt a line in the middle for the second bow in a minute has not been born; like some other over described scenes, it is better read than seen. This it was: a play for those without a theatre, with a Mansfield or a Drew to play out in the mind what one will never see on a stage.

Butler's presence grows. As he has so often before, he describes the reign of death that his new plan of campaign will create on the frontier. His superiors, weakened by humanity and morality, will have none of it. He sulks, and shows his softer side, alluded to in previous books, here:

. . . and the beauty of Walter Butler's voice struck all, so that presently, one by one, we fell silent, and he alone carried the quaint

old melody to its end.

“I have a guitar hereabouts,” blurted out Sir Peter, motioning a servant.

The instrument was brought, and Walter Butler received it without false modesty or wearying protestation, and touching it dreamily, he sang:

*Ninon ! Ninon ! Que fais-tu de la vie ? . . .*

Sad and sweet the song faded, lingering like perfume, as the deep concord of the strings died out. All were moved. We pressed him to sing more, and he sang what we desired in perfect taste and with a simplicity that fascinated all.

I, too, stood motionless under the spell . . .<sup>146</sup>

Not so spellbound that Renault forgets his duty to supply Washington with information. He is interrupted by his duty to escort Elsin Grey, who is still rapt by the vision of Walter Butler, her secret husband. His build-up as an attractive, seductive man is necessary for plot purposes: how else can the nonpareil Elsin Grey believably fall in love with him. The necessity allows to Chambers to create an anti-hero. His presence establishes a counterpart to his hero not present in the previous novels, much to the benefit of the present novel.

Butler leaves, allowing Renault and Elsin Grey to flirt—or as it was called more innocently then, to “make love.” She describes her ardent feelings and admiration for a man he knows as violently dangerous; his knowledge is revealed by his narration of the scene; he says nothing to her. The reader/audience is given two widely variant reports of Butler: as seductive gentleman and murderous guerilla.

Butler returns suddenly, with proof of Renault’s treason: a letter to Washington! He has searched Renault’s rooms while Renault was making love to Butler’s clandestine wife. He is clearly no gentleman. Then Elsin Grey reveals that she is no lady—she claims to have placed a forged letter in Renault’s rooms as a jest—leaving the unspoken question of how did she get into his rooms. The principals, alone in a room of society figures, all know the same thing: that Butler is telling the truth and that Renault and Elsin Grey are lying. Looks



are exchanged and then Butler speaks:

“My zeal, it seems, has placed me at a sorry disadvantage,” he said. “Error piled on error growing from a most unhappy misconstruction of my purposes has changed faith to suspicion, amity to coldness. I know not what to say to clear myself—” He turned his melancholy face to Elsin; all anger had faded from it, and only deepest sadness shadowed the pale brow. “I ventured to believe, in days gone by, that my devotion was not utterly displeasing—that perhaps the excesses of a stormy and impetuous youth might be condoned in the humble devotion of an honest passion—”

Then he apologizes to the host :

“I ask you, Sir, to lend a gentle judgment till I clear myself. And of your lady, I humbly beg that mercy also.” Again he bowed profoundly, hand on hilt, a perfect figure of faultless courtesy, graceful, composed, proudly enduring, proudly subduing pride.

Then he slowly raised his dark head and looked at me. “Mr. Renault,” he said, “it is my misfortune that our paths have crossed three times. I trust they cross no more, but may run hereafter in pleasant parallel. I was hasty, I was wrong to judge you by what you said concerning the Oneidas. I am impatient, oversensitive, quick to fire at what I deem to be an insult to my King. I serve him as my hot blood dictates . . .

He is allowed no such speech to Elsin Grey:

But when he turned to Elsin Grey, she softened nothing, and her gesture committed him to silence while she spoke: “End now what you have said so well, nor add one word to that delicate pyramid of eloquence which you have raised so high to your own honor, Captain Butler. I am slow-witted and must ask advice from that physician, Time, whom Mr. Renault, too, has called in council.”

“Am I then, banished?” he asked below his breath.

“Ask yourself, Mr. Butler. And if you find no reply, then I shall answer you.”<sup>147</sup>

Butler leaves and is only spoken of for the next 168 pages. At this point, he is the print equivalent of a letter or a gun, put in a drawer in Act One, which must surely be produced and used before the end of the play. Every now and then, someone rattles the drawer.

Renault, on the Mohawk frontier where the rest of the novel is set, learns more about the home life of Captain Butler from a servant:

“But Mars’ Butler he done tuk an’ run off ‘long o’ dat half-caste lady de ossifers call Carolyn Montour—“

“What!”

“Yaas, suh. Dat de way Mars’ Butler done carry on, suh. He done skedaddle ‘long o’ M’ss Carolyn. Hit wuz a Mohawk weddin’, Mars Carus.”

Renault assimilates the new information:

Thought halted. Was it possible that Walter Butler had dared invade the tiger-brood of citrine Montour to satisfy his unslaked lust?

Was it possible that he dared affront the she-demon of Catherinestown by ignoring an alliance with her fiercely beautiful child? . . . Where passion led this libertine, nothing barred his way—neither fear nor pity. And he had even dared to reckon with this frightful hag, Catrine Montour—this devil’s spawn of Frontenac—and her tawny offspring.<sup>148</sup>

Renault visits the sequestered Butler manse, and imagines the ghosts of the victims who now inhabit it:

. . . wraiths dripping red from Cherry Valley—children with throats cut; women with bleeding heads and butchered bodies, stabbed through and through—and perhaps the awful specter of Lieutenant Boyd, with eyes and nails plucked out, and tongue cut off, bound to the stake and slowly roasting to death, while Walter Butler watched the agony curiously, interested and surprised to see a disemboweled man live so long!<sup>149</sup>

Shortly afterwards, Renault is to meet another key to the dual nature of Walter Butler.

Having met the noble lady of fashion and fortune whom he has seduced, we meet another conquest.

Astounded, almost incredulous, I glared at the vision. Gradually the shock of the surprise subsided; details took shape under my wandering eyes—the slim legs, doubled under, clothed with fringed and beaded leggings to the hips, the gorgeous embroidered sporran, moccasins and clout, the smooth naked back, gleaming like palest amber under curtains of stiffly strung scarlet-and-gold traders’ wampum—traders’ wampum? What did *that* mean? And what did those heavy, double masses of hair indicate—those soft, twisted ropes of glossy hair, braided half-way with crimson silk shot with silver, then hanging a cloudy shock of black to the belted waist?

Here was no Iroquois youth—no adolescent of the Long House attired for any rite I ever heard of. The hip-leggings were of magnificent Algonquin work; the quill-set, sinew embroidered moccasins, too. That stringy, iridescent veil of rose scarlet, and gold wampum on the naked body was de fantasie; the belt and knife sheath pure Huron. As for the gipsy-like

arrangement of the hair, no Iroquois boy ever wore it that way; it hinted of the *gens de prairie*. What on earth did it mean? . . . after a little while, a strange apprehension settled into absolute conviction as I looked. So certain was I that every gathered muscle relaxed; I drew a deep, noiseless breath of relief, smiling to myself, and stepped coolly forward, letting the secret door swing to behind me with a deadened thud.

Like a startled tree-cat the figure sprang to its feet, whirling to confront me. And I laughed again, for I was looking into the dark, dilated eyes of a young girl.

"Have no fear," I began quietly; and the next instant the words were driven into my throat, for she was on me in one bound, hunting-knife glittering.

Round the walls we reeled, staggering, wrestling, clinched like infuriated wolverines.<sup>150</sup>

It is Carolyn "Lyn" Montour, tawny offspring of the frightful hag Catrine Montour, and Walter Butler's first wife, but there is obviously more information here than marriage banns.

First and least is the casual, fashionable racism of 1907. The Negro Minstrel who first informs Renault of Mars' Butler's doings in the woods is a stereotype of the time, and hideous accent aside, a decent enough menial. Chambers' frontier whites are not that much higher in intellect, but more intelligible, and, when biddable, more useful. Below them in humanity are the native peoples of these woods. More animal-like in every way, capable of either canine faithfulness or animal ferocity, they still excel the even more debased fruit of mixed-race unions. Lyn Montour is the result of two such unions, and displays animal tendencies; "tree-cat" and "wolverine" describe her.

Renault as well. They wrestle "like infuriated wolverines"—contact of any kind with such as her brings out the animal in the most polite gentleman. ". . . the smooth, naked back . . . gold wampum on the naked body . ." Two "naked's" on the same page, physically describing an unmistakably exciting person, is two more than applied to Elsin Grey in the entire book. The relief felt by Renault when he realizes that he is in fact looking at a young *woman*, is manifested by a deep breath and a door closing with a deadened thud.

We are now fully in the world of Walter Butler. He himself is away, but his surrogates—cringing menials who relate his deeds with fear and awe, a house full of ghosts, a feral bride—speak to his character. Butler is at home in this terrifying world, a world in which Renault's surmises barely approach the reality, even when he partakes of them—the rich description of the savage androgen in the heart of the forest, and his attraction to it, his relief seeing that it is a young girl with dark dilated eyes, broken only when she tries to stab him—it's a good thing he's a gentleman.

Finally subduing the savage girl and hearing her story, Renault now has all the pieces of the puzzle. The knowledge of the plot allows him to foil Butler's frontier conspiracy; knowledge of his prior marriage allows him to report to Elsin Grey that Butler's second marriage to her is bigamous. Revelation is through—the third act of the novel is all resolution of the conflicts created in the first two. Nearly all of it is character-based. Butler is able to nearly succeed because of his complete lack of scruple; Elsin and Renault risk unhappiness because of their very fine sense of honor. The fact that Elsin is pledged to a scoundrel is of lesser importance than the fact that she has given her promise—to whom it does not matter. Renault may free her of the obligation by killing Butler, and do his duty to his country as well, but in so doing he profits himself. His sense of honor will not allow him.

Renault has a confrontation with Butler in the woods at the site of an aborted council with the Iroquois. He brings him news that his plot is foiled, and he brings Lyn Montour to let him know that his private misdeeds are now known to his worst enemy.

I watched his every careless gesture, every movement, every flutter of his insolent eyelids . . . in his belt I saw a roll of paper, closely scribbled, and knew it to be a speech composed for delivery at this fire, now burned out forever. He placed his hands on his hips, pacing to and fro the distance between the fire and the edge of the Dead Water, now looking thoughtfully up at the blue sky, now lost in reverie.<sup>151</sup>

Again, this is less description than stage management and the correct placement of props and acting notes. Butler soon escapes—there is nothing left for him to do in the scene anyway—and Renault carries on in his public and private duties: as a soldier, he must defend the Mohawk Valley from the raid led by Butler; as a lover, he must inform Elsin Grey that her marriage is a sham. He cannot do both.

What in God's name was I to do? Go to her and leave these women and babies?—leave these dull-witted men to defend themselves?<sup>152</sup>

He has not much use for the rustics who populate the valley, whom he must now save. His force of Rangers, the local men recruited in the valley for scouting work, are his elite unit, which will rally the dull wits of the militia against the raiders.

In the midst of his preparation, he receives a letter for Elsin Grey; he has *just* missed her, as he often does, and has not yet told her she is free. Her letter reflects this:

Dearest, it came to me like a flash of light what I must do—what God meant me to do. Can you not understand, my darling? We are utterly helpless here. I must go back to this man—to this man who is riding hither with death on his right hand, and on his left hand, death!

Oh, Carus! Carus! My sin has found me out! It is written that man should not put asunder those joined together. I have defied Him! Yet He repays, mercifully, offering me my last chance.<sup>153</sup>

No human being ever wrote such words, except to be inserted into a melodrama, and few even then, but this is page 356, and if you have made it this far, you are not nitpicking.

Renault, reading them, goes forth to face his duty and his mortal enemy, certain that his last chance of private happiness has gone.

His force meets Butler's at West Canada Creek, in intermittent snowfall and sunshine, and he sees Butler crossing the creek.

A dozen Oneidas were after him. His horse, spurred to a gallop, crashed through the brush, and was in the water at a leap; and he turned in midstream and shook his pistol at them insultingly.

By Heaven, he rode superbly as the swollen waters of the ford boiled to his horse's straining shoulders, while the bullets clipped the gilded cocked hat from his head and struck his raised pistol from his hand. . . "Take him alive, I cried!"<sup>154</sup>

But a man cannot be saved from himself.

. . . I saw Walter Butler ride up on the opposite side of the creek, glance backward, then calmly draw bridle in plain sight. He was fey; I knew it. His doom was upon him. He flung himself down from his horse close to the ford . . . then he knelt down, drew his tin cup from his belt, bent over and looked into the placid silver pool. What he saw reflected there Christ alone knows, for he sprang back, passed his hand across his eyes, and reached out his cup blindly, plunging it deep into the water.

Never, never shall I forget that instant picture as it broke upon my view; my deadly enemy kneeling by the spring, black hair disheveled, the sunshine striking his tin cup as he raised it to his lips; the three naked Oneidas, in their glistening scarlet paint, eagerly raising their rifles, while the merciless weapons of Murphy and Elerson slowly fell to the same level . . .

Renault's call to take him alive is unheard

. . . flame after flame parted from these leveled muzzles; and through the whirling smoke I saw Walter Butler fall, roll over and over, his body and limbs contracting with agony; then on all fours again, on his knees, only to sink back in a sitting posture, his head resting on his hand, blood pouring between his fingers.

Into the stream plunged an Oneida, rifle and knife aloft, glittering in the sun. The wounded man saw him coming, and watched him as he leaped up the bank; and while Walter Butler looked him full in the face the savage trembled, crouching, gathering for a leap.

"Stop that murder!" I shouted, plunging into the ford as Butler, aching head still lifted, turned a deadly face to me. One eye had been shot out, but the creature was still alive, and knew me—knew me, heard me ask for the quarter he had not asked for; saw me coming to save him from his destiny, and smiled as the Oneida sprang upon him with a yell and ripped the living scalp away before my sickened eyes.

"Finish him, in God's mercy!" bellowed the Ranger Sammons, running up. The Oneida's hatchet, swinging like lightning, flashed once; and the severed soul of Walter Butler was free of the battered, disfigured thing that lay oozing crimson in the trampled snow.

Dead! And I heard the awful scalp-yell swelling from the throats of those who had felt his heavy hand. Dead! And I heard cheers from those whose loved ones had gone down to death to satiate his fury. . . .

As I gazed down at him the roar of the fusillade died away in my ears. I remembered him as I had seen him there at New York in our house,

his slim fingers wandering over the strings of the guitar, his dark eyes drowned in melancholy. I remembered his voice, and the song he sang, haunting us all with its lingering sadness—the hopeless words, the sad air, redolent of dead flowers—doom, death, decay!<sup>155</sup>

Then, on the remaining pages of the novel, Renault is reunited with Elsin Grey.

“This way, lad. She lies in a camp-wagon at headquarters, asleep, I think . . . And the girl, Montour, lies stretched beside her, watching her as a dog watches a cradled child.”<sup>156</sup>

He finds and awakens her.

“Bear me if you will,” she breathed, her white arms tightening about my neck; “carry me with all the burdens you have borne so long, my strong, tall lover!—lest I dash my foot against a stone, and fall at your feet to worship and adore!”<sup>157</sup>

Lyn Montour, the wolverine now tamed to canine servility, has also been matched to a frontier rustic, befitting her station. The End.

It should be clear from the dialogue that Chambers never really lost his taste for the theatre, and the theatre of Augustin Daly and Clyde Fitch at that. He also wanted to do things that could not be done properly in a theatre. It was no great effort then to create a set that could simulate something of the forest, but a running stream and the glint of a tin cup—to say nothing of a man with his face half shot away—were still out of reach. Forced to create a scene without the melodramatic devices in his repertoire, Chambers writes a vivid description of action in a natural setting, which Renault’s futile attempt at honorable mercy cannot diminish. If he wants Butler spared, he’s the only person on earth who does, and that mercy is mostly a function of his own egoism and sense of his high honor. Chambers certainly doesn’t; this is a scene he must have rewritten several times. He sets it in the nature he loved, and the men in it seem to act more natural as a result. The overwhelming silence of a winter forest swallows all the stage-driven impulses to pose and emote.

The resolution of the lovers' quandary is almost perfunctory. Elsin Grey is a pallid heroine, her clothes are described in more detail than her eyebrow, and the illustration of her in the novel is little more specific than a catalog manikin; in that way she can be the girl at the next counter, or at the desk in the corner; everyman's desire. Renault is no more than a voice, insisting on his own fine feeling, speaking always of his honorable tendencies and reporting how he is lauded by the good. Nothing he does is a surprise, or is inconsistent, except for that moment watching the androgen in the woods, so startling that Chambers himself might not have realized what he was writing. Elsin Grey and Renault are surrogates, embodiments of the reader's own desire for esteem and success.



Walter Butler is the embodiment of something else. At the most basic level, he is the villain, the man who does what should not be done, the bloody embodiment of ruthless will and ambition. Some of the sins he commits are the ones history charged him with doing; these are a given, based on his previous appearances in the *Cardigan* novels. The new sins are ahistorical, created by Chambers and sexual in nature. Butler's sexual attraction is fatal to English Hon's and Métis wildcats, and, presumably, everyone in between, and he uses it to trap the women who succumb to it. Any woman falling under his spell is degraded by the contact; no woman's reputation could be unspoiled after a bigamous marriage, either in society or on the frontier. Elsin Grey's name remains unsullied as long as her secret is kept by Renault. Lyn Montour's only feasible match is to a forest runner as wild as she. Both



women are extreme opposites of American society; Butler spans them both.

Commentators today decry the glorification of bad role models in films like *Scarface*, just as they did in 1932 in films like *Scarface*. These gangster films use a plot formula of allowing their evil hero to succeed, right up until the last few scenes, in which he is killed, but in the same blaze of glory that he enjoyed throughout the film. This is not a new thing, even in 1907 when Chambers employed the same formula, but in tricornes and knee breeches. Butler is allowed to enjoy a career of violence, ambition and sexual excess; thwarted finally by the hero, he scorns surrender and mercy, and dies heroically on the field of battle, in the prime of life, hurling defiance and scorn at his enemies as he falls.

Chambers would resurrect him twice again; once for a novel a few years later, as a cameo appearance, shorthand for a dire fate for the novel's antihero. *The Hidden Children* refers to the novel's central plot element, that of the substituted child, the changeling, the person or people with a secret identity, unknown even to themselves. Specifically it refers to an imaginary Iroquois custom of removing children from their clan and raising them in secret, away from the degenerating influence of tribal society, and returning them at maturity, untainted. There is no such custom; the cornerstone of Iroquois society is the communal experience of the extended family of the clan, and children removed and raised outside of it would be deemed not quite human. The theme of society as a taint to be resisted and a bar to true humanity is a European theme, coming from Rousseau and finding its expression in romantic works like Wordsworth's *The Shepherd Lord*.

The hero is Evan Loskiel, an American officer preparing the way for the invasion of the Iroquois homelands in 1779. His leader and friend is Thomas Boyd, a dashing young scout with an eye for the ladies. They cross the northern colonies on their duties, and encounter many of the same things encountered by the heroes of the previous novels:

random action, historical figures of the frontier, Walter Butler. The main relationship is that of Loskiel and a strange lost girl, named Lois, fated to meet repeatedly. Loskiel is an orphan, and so is she, and as we expect, they are the hidden children of the title, whose very existence makes them the mortal enemies of certain factions. Loskiel must foil these factions and protect Lois, which he does. There is no prime villain as in *The Reckoning*, only cameos like Butler and Hiokatoo, the Seneca chief and co-despoiler of Cherry Valley; they barely make appearances. Neither is there much of a hero. Loskiel simply tries to survive and keep Lois alive. His duty to the army, or his honor, present no conflict. Boyd is more the heroic type, but he is fated to die horribly at the hands of the Seneca, as we well know from history and *The Reckoning*. As a result, the novel is not as melodramatically successful as the earlier works. It is a sequel, an idea for a novel, whose parts do not ever create a sum.

The parts may have seemed promising at one time. The lost girl Lois is more fragile and human than Elsin Grey; she admits to keeping herself alive at one point by living with an American officer as his mistress. Even more surprising, Loskiel does not turn away in revulsion; pity is added to his strong feeling for her. Boyd enjoys and exploits the power his looks and manner have over susceptible women. His horrible end keeps a good, weak girl from ruining herself.

Tied to the potential but dull details of an army in preparation, Chambers fills the narrative with past action. Seeing the 7<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts on a routine detail, Loskiel recalls their past service as the garrison of Cherry Valley,

. . . seeming still to feel the disgrace of Cherry Valley, where their former  
colonel lost his silly life . . .<sup>158</sup>

He finds a cache of scalps taken by the scouts Murphy and Elerson—the executioners of Walter Butler in *The Reckoning*—and determines that they were taken by the Seneca.

Which meant that Walter Butler and that spawn of Satan, Sayanquarata, were now prowling around our outer pickets. For the ferocious Senecas and their tireless war-chief, Sayanquarata, were Butler's people; the Mohawks and Joseph Brant holding the younger Butler in deep contempt for the cruelty he did practice at Cherry Valley.<sup>159</sup>

A young woman describes Butler's family, held hostage:

I saw his mother and sister in Albany a week ago—two sad and pitiable women, Euan, for every furtive glance cats after them seemed to shout aloud the infamy of their son and brother, the Murderer of Cherry Valley.  
<sup>160</sup>

Loskiel recalls, as is often done of Butler, the fine and charming youth who has become a monster, but listing just enough of his virtues to make a prologue to the fact that his father has disowned him. Chambers seems here to draw back from the charming devil of *The Reckoning*. Butler is now a young man whose family is ashamed of him for the disgrace he has brought them. He has made his mother cry—nothing charming or devilish about that. Chambers would speak later, privately, about crossing the line in playing devil's advocate, and he would never do so again, using Butler only as a conventionally sordid villain, among other villains.

His hero gives a lesson in early 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnology:

Those vile, horse-riding, murdering, thieving nomad Indians of the plains—those homeless, wandering, plundering violators of women and butchers of children, had nothing whatever in common with our forest Indians of the East—were a totally different race of people, mentally, spiritually, and physically. . . . Only the Senecas resembled the degraded robbers of the Western plains in having naturally evil and debased propensities, and entertaining similar gross and monstrous customs and most wicked superstitions.<sup>161</sup>

The Seneca are the allies and tools, in the story, of Walter Butler, and in real life, the largest and most powerful tribe of the Iroquois Confederacy. Whether or not Chambers believed the speech he wrote for Euen is of little importance; the majority of his audience did, and so did the President of the United States, and so did the President of Harvard, or he would not

have voiced it so nakedly. The British generals and regular soldiers, who eagerly enlisted the Iroquois, are spared the disapproval extended to their allies and their Loyalist functionaries who actually did the dirty work of empire for the polite gentlemen of New York society. This too is a common theme in the histories of the time. Blood being thicker than water, the comity of the English-speaking peoples necessitated a blind eye to certain painful realities of the bloody divorce that divided them. All the horrors of the frontier war were laid at the feet of the Iroquois themselves and their Tory handlers, often described as renegades. That nearly all of those Tories went north after the war to found British Canada gave birth to another semantic trick; these were *Canadians*, not Tories, who presumably went off in the woods and died.

The last notable scene of the novel, aside from the inevitable romantic resolution, depicts the death of Boyd. A prisoner in the British/Iroquois camp, he seeks and gains the protection of Joseph Brant, who gives it willingly to a brother Mason. Then Brant is called away and Butler arrives on the scene, seeking information about the invading American army. Boyd refuses to talk and invokes Brant's protection. Butler ignores him and gives him over to the Iroquois for ritual torture.

The novel includes an illustration of that scene, the moment when Butler



proposes and Boyd refuses. Boyd sits on a log, disheartened; Butler standing beside him, sword in hand, in full regimentals, leaning towards the dark mass of Indians in the

foreground, in apparent shadow, barely human. A savage in a headdress appears over his shoulder, awaiting Butler's gift. In all the novels in which he appears, it is the only illustration of Butler.

Chambers would return to the New York frontier wars for material, but not for seven years. When he did, his string was starting to run thin. His last-ever top ten bestseller was two years in the past. He may not have needed a bestseller; his novels had been selling for twenty-seven years and were still selling, but there was something old-fashioned about his style and matter. He did not receive many serious reviews, only brief notices announcing that another of his books was out and that it was another society romance, history or adventure.

However, there are other ways to judge his popularity. The movies had come along and adopted many of his novels. Between 1916 and 1920, nineteen movies based on his work would be filmed, an average of four a year. Their plot-heavy mode of story telling emphasized the melodrama of his plots, and short-changed the scene setting or dialogue that tried to transcend them, but their popular appeal is self-evident. The slide for the 1917 adaptation of *The Hidden Children* includes Chambers' name in type smaller than the actors', but larger than the director's. Even more interesting, this is a slide for a coming attraction projected on the screen between features. There is no contractual obligation for a credit on such media; it was clearly seen as an added drawing point to mention his name.



If one may call it so, he received yet another accolade from the movie world, one he

wisely chose to ignore. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, how much more so is plagiarism?

*What his contemporaries called the "problem of Robert W. Chambers" remains the problem of today in popular culture. Serious, able authors are driven from the shelves and public attention, displaced by hacks and careerists with no sense more powerful than the knowledge of what the public thinks it wants. It says little for the intellectual marketplace of a democratic society when it chooses trash over substance. Chambers spun five novels from one of the threads left by Harold Frederic and any one of those five novels probably outsold Frederic's entire body of work.*

*One troubling aspect is that the other threads left by Frederic were neglected. The polyglot vitality of his frontier society is reduced by Chambers to ethnic minstrelsy and outright racism. The underlying social tensions of the Revolutionary frontier are largely ignored, and the rejection of European hierarchies for American democracy is replaced by sham gentility in which descent and good manners are mistaken for character.*

*One can hardly blame Chambers for responding to the market, even if he had helped make that market. He does not seem to have set out to do anything from a malicious intent. But it is largely due to him that, for decades afterward, Cherry Valley now becomes the place where Walter Butler spent a day.*

## Chapter Six: Robert M. Goldstein: *The Spirit of '76*, 1917

*Despite the decline of historical integrity resulting from Frederic's artistic ambitions and Chambers' commercial needs, despite the drift of the story into a back-story for one of its characters, it is yet possible to see the line of continuation as an organic one, arising from local authors, native or adoptive, telling a local story to the wider world. Frederic was closely acquainted with the land, the people and the story. Chambers knew the woods and its natural life—so strict a critic as Edmund Wilson thought his nature writing his best work. Both men knew the material and knew where they had made departures for dramatic effect.*

*Now that same drift would be accelerated violently, almost dementedly, by another author with almost no knowledge of New York's revolutionary frontier. That knowledge he had was apparently gleaned from the more lurid passages of Chambers' novels. That knowledge was the source of an epic motion picture, supervised by a virtual amateur with no credentials other than burning ambition and the illusion of a long line of credit. The continuing story of the matter of Cherry Valley and its gradual perversion in popular culture must give way to the story of Robert M. Goldstein, and what takes place in popular culture when everything that can go wrong happens.*

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the nascent film industry that had grown up in the environs of New York fled west, to avoid the relentless subpoenas of Thomas Edison's lawyers, seeking to enforce the monopoly of Edison's patents. That they were patents on devices copied assiduously from French originals was beside the point. The picture people fled to California, to a city with a basic layer of civilization, but far enough from the legal establishment to allow them to make friends among the small town courts and sheriffs who would have to enforce Edison's patents, or not enforce them. Los Angeles and its suburbs was as far as one could get from New Jersey and Edison before the Pacific Ocean intervened; it was the natural end of the Wild West, where a sheriff could be counted on to



stay bought; close enough to the amenities of San Francisco for a relaxing weekend, but a long way from its courts.

One of those amenities was a thriving theatrical community. Simon Goldstein owned a costuming company there; in 1912 his son Robert opened a branch in Los Angeles. When D.W. Griffith made *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, his actors wore costumes supplied by Robert Goldstein, who also invested in the epic. Goldstein had grown up in show business, in the part that made steady but unspectacular money. In Los Angeles, he saw first hand how a man could make a fortune and fame in the movie business. He decided to make a picture.<sup>162</sup>



Hannah Lightfoot/Catherine Montour (*Adda Gleason*), Robert M. Goldstein, George III (*Jack Cosgrove*). Joseph Brant (*Chief Dark Cloud*) in background.

Griffith's apprenticeship in pictures had begun after a career in the theatre. He had been a journeyman repertory actor when he began making short films with small crews and casts. By the time he began *The Birth of a Nation*, Griffith had been making movies for ten years; in that time, he had directed 497 separate pictures, most of them shorts, learning his



craft slowly, working his way up to the long form of the epic picture. That was the point at which Robert Goldstein wanted to *start*.

Copying Griffith, he decided to make an epic picture about American history. Not willing to go so far as to copy Griffith's own subject, he chose a story from the Revolution. The story promised the epic scope of *The Birth of a Nation*, literally so, and had the appeal of an uplifting civics lesson, likely to gain the endorsement and approval of the better parts of society. So had Griffith's epic initially, until the picture's intense racism drew criticism. By choosing the Revolution as his subject, Goldstein may have thought that he chose a topic epic, uplifting and safe. In the early fall of 1916, *The Spirit of '76* began location shooting in Idyllwild. Goldstein's company, Continental Producing, announced that the movie was budgeted at \$200,000.<sup>163</sup>

Howard Gaye, playing the hero Lionel Esmond,, had worked for D. W. Griffith, playing Robert E. Lee in *The Birth of a Nation* and Jesus Christ in *Intolerance*. Goldstein seems to have hoped that some of Griffith's magic would rub off on his picture if he hired as many Griffith alumni as possible. He tried to hire George Siegmann to direct; Siegmann had played *The Birth of a Nation*'s villainous mulatto Silas Lynch, and had done second unit directing as well—as had Gaye.<sup>164</sup> William Freeman played the sentry who had given Lillian Gish a lovestruck stare in *The Birth of a Nation*; now he played Lord Chatham. W.E. Lawrence, Goldstein's Captain Boyd, had played Henry of Navarre in *Intolerance*. Joseph Brant was played by Dark Cloud, born Elijah Tahamont; a year ago he'd played an Ethiopian Chieftain in *Intolerance*, and two years before that a General in *The Birth of a Nation*. Jack Cosgrove, now George III, was *Intolerance*'s Babylonian Chief Eunuch.<sup>165</sup> In 1916 Hollywood, it might have been hard to find an actor who *badn't* worked for Griffith.

Frank Montgomery directed; he'd helmed eighty pictures to date. George L. Hutchin

co-wrote the scenario with Robert Goldstein. Goldstein's job as producer was to find the money, or the illusion of money, to keep the production going. Screenwriting was not his job; he must have wanted to do it. He started with the conscious plan of emulating the structure and form of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, but set during the American Revolution. Like Griffith, he would show as many tableaux of actual historical events—in this case, Paul Revere's ride, the Battle of Lexington, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Cornwallis' Surrender—amid a plot crafted to place his characters in the way of history. Most important, he had to create a compelling narrative.

Stripped of the tableaux, his scenario can be summarized thus:

A French officer, Montour, serving in Quebec, meets and marries an Indian princess and lives among her people. They have a son and daughter. Americans raiding their village kill Montour. The princess loses her son in the turmoil. Her father, who disapproved of her marriage, orders her to give up her daughter. Instead she has the girl carried off and put aboard the ship of Captain Lightfoot, bound for London. Here ends the prologue.

Years later, George III reviews his troops in London. He is accompanied by his aide, a young American, Lionel Esmond. Esmond thinks himself a foundling; in fact, he is the son of Montour and the Princess. During the review, the King notices a beautiful young girl in the crowd, and sends Esmond off to find her. He meets the girl, Hannah Lightfoot, and feels an attraction to her. Unbeknownst to either, she is also the child of Montour and the Princess, Catherine Montour.

The King goes through a form of marriage to Hannah, but his ministers set up a dynastic marriage with a German princess, and Hannah is put aside. The visit to court of Joseph Brant, pledging his loyalty to the crown, inspires Hannah to use Brant to make herself Queen of the Iroquois. The king consents. But Hannah has formed an infatuation for

Lionel Esmond; as he is about to submit to her, they are surprised in her bedroom by King George and Joseph Brant. Esmond is wounded and sent away to join the British Army in Boston. There he sympathizes with the rebels, and after Lexington, joins the American Army.

The outbreak of the Revolution inspires the discarded Hannah to begin her plan to make herself Queen of the Iroquois. The King consents, but they are overheard by Lord Chatham, who angrily promises to thwart Hannah. Their violent dispute causes the King to have a relapse into insanity. Chatham goes to denounce her plan in Parliament. Intercut with this scene are the scenes of the American congress debating. While they decide independence, Chatham rises to speak in Parliament, but collapses and dies; Hannah, in the gallery, exults. So ends Part One.

At the intermission the audience was awaiting the resolution of dramas both public and private. The struggle for American independence against the old world's decadent tyranny was told in counterpart with individual struggles of ambition and patriotism. This was how Griffith told his epic stories, humanizing great events by showing the human stories in their shadows. Griffith was able to balance his need to edify his audience with his greater need to entertain it. That was the challenge awaiting Goldstein in the second half of his picture.

At the start of the second half, the action moves to the Iroquois homelands in the Mohawk Valley. Hannah/Catherine has arrived at the mansion of Sir John Johnson, leader of the local Tories, to pursue her regal ambition, and to pursue Lionel Esmond as well. Here she meets one of her allies, Captain Walter Butler, planning a raid on the local Rebel stronghold of Cherry Valley.

Esmond, Hannah/Catherine's beloved/brother, has joined Morgan's Riflemen on

duty in the Mohawk Valley. His associates there include scouts Tim Murphy and Captain Boyd. He tries to rekindle an old romance with a local beauty, Cecile Stewart, but her Tory father forbids him to speak to her. Likewise crossed in love is Captain Boyd; betrothed to Tory Sir John Johnson's daughter Peggy, he is also loved by Madeline, daughter of Joseph Brant.

Murphy returns from a scout and reports that the Iroquois witch/shamaness Queen Esther is in the woods, on her way to Hannah/Catherine's council, where the alliance of the Iroquois will be decided. Madeline leads the scouts and Esmond to the meeting place in the woods. Boyd and Madeline go off alone; he assaults her but is thwarted by the arrival of Queen Esther. Boyd then continues on to the council. There, Hannah/Catherine and Madeline argue their cases to the assembled Iroquois; Madeline's arguments bring half of the tribes over to the Americans.

Hannah/Catherine, still in love with Esmond, now plots with Walter Butler to compromise Cecile Stewart, Esmond's beloved; their plot is foiled by her father, who quits the conspiracy in disgust.

A pair of tableaux ensue. Hannah/Catherine and her co-conspirators go to General Howe in Philadelphia, there partaking in the elaborate masque called the *Mischianza*. Simultaneously, Esmond attends Washington at Valley Forge, witnessing the suffering there.

Back in the Valley, Hannah/Catherine combines her Iroquois with Johnson's Tories and they prepare to attack the rebels at Cherry Valley. Cecile Stewart confronts Hannah/Catherine, and they fight a duel, ended by Gowah, a friendly Iroquois who helps Cecile escape. The raiders go on to Cherry Valley. The massacre takes place. Peggy Johnson, Sir John's daughter, is scalped and Cecile's father is killed; Boyd is captured and burned at the stake. Esmond arrives with troops, but is too late and Cecile is taken away as a prisoner.



Jane Novak (*Cecile Steuart*) lower right at the Iroquois Castle

Esmond joins the Americans invading the Iroquois homelands, hoping to rescue Cecile. She is about to be burned at the stake, but Hannah/Catherine offers Esmond Cecile's life in exchange for his hand in marriage. He agrees. Hannah/Catherine leads them safely through the lines and then demands that Esmond keep his word. He reluctantly agrees. As they leave, the broken half of an officer's gorget, a badge of authority, shows at his neck. Hannah/Catherine reaches into her clothing and produces a similar piece, similarly broken. The two pieces match. Queen Esther, who has followed them, sees the gorget and recognizes it as the badge of her husband, Jean Montour. She tells Esmond and Hannah/Catherine that they are her children, brother and sister.

This news drives Hannah/Catherine mad, and she disappears, screaming, into the forest. Esmond and Cecile are reunited. The Americans attack the Iroquois and Tories, and Johnson and Butler make a last stand. Esmond, Murphy and Gowah lead the attack. In the fighting Gowah pursues Butler and they fight, Murphy arriving in time to shoot Butler as he

tries to stab Gowah.



Walter Butler (*George Chesborough*) fights Gowah (*John Big Tree*)

The picture ends with the surrender of Cornwallis and the marriage of Esmond and Cecile.<sup>166</sup>

“In “Howe's Masquerade” we observe something which resembles plagiarism--but which *may be* a very flattering coincidence of thought.”<sup>167</sup>

The factor used most often to determine plagiarism is *points of similarity*. If a certain number of plot details, story elements or lines are close or identical to a previous work, we say that a work is plagiarized. One number quoted is forty, but one major point may be worth more than several minor ones. There are also unconscious borrowings, or conscious ones close but not close enough to call.

The synopsis that appears above is an edited version of the one that appeared in Goldstein's narrative. If he did not actually write it, he dictated it to the person who did.

Those are, at one remove at most, his words. It is a story that seems to have been cobbled together almost completely from the original stories of Robert W. Chambers.

Chambers did not “own” his historical borrowings or his melodramatic plot twists. Many of the main characters are historical figures. Chambers’ “ownership” rests in the fact of his bringing them out of the obscurity of local history, burnishing their images in a certain way and presenting them in a dramatic fashion. Without Chambers, the Brants, the Montours, the Johnsons and especially Walter Butler, would be footnotes or sidebars in obscure texts.

As well, Goldstein copied Chambers’ melodramatic contrivances—the plebian American loving the aristocratic lady, and thwarted by her Tory father, the secret brother and sister of the Iroquois frontier, the antiheroic Lt./Capt. Boyd, the star-villain status of Walter Butler—and copied his errors as well. Morgan’s Riflemen never served in the Mohawk Valley, but Chambers put them there, and so does Goldstein. There are so many points of similarity, in so consistent a style, that it is difficult to think that they are all there unconsciously, and from that, to think that *any* of them are there by coincidence.

There is only one real defense for plagiarism. G.F. Handel, playing a new air for some friends, was asked if it was not based a little too much on a similar air by Thomas Arne. Of course it was, said Handel, but look what *he* did with it. Chambers and Goldstein do not come anywhere near the level of these artists. Here the sole concern is monetary. Goldstein took some of Chambers’ property to make a profit, and thus Chambers was due his share of the proceeds. Had Chambers seen *The Spirit of ’76*, there’s a good chance he would have called his lawyer. But he probably never saw it, or heard about the coincidences, and even if he had, he would have had every reason to keep quiet about it.

The picture was made in fits and starts, as financing appeared and vanished.

Goldstein's efforts to hold the production together while searching for financing, even by his own account, seem heroic. He was clearly obsessed by the project and fully intended to equal or surpass Griffith in his first picture. In a final grand gesture, actors and extras were summoned to snow-covered Donner Pass to film the all-important scenes of Washington at Valley Forge—no fake snow, no inserts, but a full bodied scene with a thousand extras in the snow.<sup>168</sup>

Finally Goldstein was able to assemble a rough cut to show to a mixed audience of prominent citizens and investors. The remarks seemed favorable, and the premiere in San Francisco was imminent, except that no theatres there were available by the time the picture was finally edited. Instead, Goldstein reluctantly agreed to premiere *The Spirit of '76* in Chicago, in Orchestra Hall, on May 7, 1917. His reluctance was based on the difficulty given Griffith by the police censorship board, headed by Major Metallus Lucullus Cicero Funkhouser. The board had the authority to require any scenes objectionable to any race or nationality edited out of a picture; the edits required for *The Birth of a Nation* were so extensive that Griffith simply refused and lost his permit. Goldstein remonstrated with the censor, invoking Griffith. "Oh, yes", Funkhouser replied. "Griffith thinks that he is a little tin Jesus and you are another one like him. He got away with it, but you won't."<sup>169</sup>

It is difficult to say exactly whether Goldstein was as naïve as he expresses himself, or his obsession was so deep that he was unaware of the nature of the censor's objection. Major Funkhouser—appearing at the board in uniform, having come from a military parade—declared that if he cut out every objectionable scene, there would not be a thousand feet of footage left. The United States had just entered the World War allied to Great Britain, and Robert Goldstein had made an epic portraying the British, from the King on down, as mad, licentious, brutes and murderers. Funkhouser was not the Keystone Kop he sounds



like—his description of Griffith is close to the mark—and he had just banned *The Little American*, starring Mary Pickford, for its many scenes of brutal German soldiers, likely to offend Chicago's large ethnic German population. As for Goldstein's First Amendment rights, they did not exist. The Supreme Court had ruled, two years before, that moving pictures did not have that protection.<sup>170</sup>

There were sixteen cuts that Goldstein needed to make. They ranged from the innocuous: King George shown eating fried eggs, to the immoral: Esmond's flirtation with his yet-to-be known sister, and the fact of their blood tie; Walter Butler dragging Cecile Stewart upstairs to be ravished—to the incendiary: the violent details of the Cherry Valley massacre; a great loss to Goldstein since it provided the cue for Esmond's rangers' ride to the rescue, the climax of the film. One of those details was the bayoneting of a baby by an English soldier. However they distressed him, he made the edits. He was still a showman, determined to press on and to be judged finally by strangers in a vast dark hall, and the critics of Chicago.

The reviews were good. The Chicago *American*:

Never before has there been gathered history, romance, adventure, story, picture in such perfection. It is a stage classic. It is the very heart of what our patriotism is based on; it is *The Spirit of '76*! It is worthwhile in every meaning of the word worth. Probably no stranger ever received a less cordial welcome in our city than Robert Goldstein, the producer and director of this picture. The enthusiasm of the first night crowd should help to wipe out the memory of this.

The Chicago *Daily Journal*:

*The Spirit of '76* has clearly defined values. It has every chance of winning wide popularity. Robert Goldstein would probably be the last man to compare his picture to *The Birth of a Nation*, but to anyone who sees it, the comparison is inevitable. There are many thrilling scenes, the most exciting of these being the Ride of Paul Revere which is excellently imagined and capitably handled. This scene brought the crowd to its feet last night.

There was a noisy and continuous demonstration during the entire course of the long scene.

The Chicago *Tribune*:

The picture drew tremendous applause from the audience that surely would not have applauded if it thought that its patriotism was being seduced. To sum it all up, the acting, costumes, sets, photography and direction are all excellent.

The Chicago *Evening Post*

It shows earnestness and sincerity on the part of its producer throughout its entire length and if it falls short of perfection and an artistic standpoint, it is because the subject is really too great.<sup>171</sup>

A caveat here. These are the reviews that Goldstein quoted; he makes no mention of negative reviews in Chicago. At this time there was not much in the way of serious film criticism. The art was still in its infancy. A newspaper writer could be assigned the role of film critic with no background in film or criticism. The idea of movies as art had not yet taken; they were somewhere below the legitimate theatre and barely level with vaudeville. Not that long ago, actors from the stage appearing in movies had changed their name in order to preserve their stage reputation. *The Spirit of '76* was not judged with the same rigor that a critic would apply to a production of *Othello* or *Otello*.

*The Spirit of '76* was created and reviewed as an entertainment. In that sense, based on these reviews, Goldstein had succeeded. The public response, however, was tempered for him by the knowledge that they were seeing a mutilated version of what he had envisioned. This was an experience he shared with nearly every other movie maker. There is nothing to indicate in his own account if he ever wondered if the reception experienced in Chicago was due to the edits, and not in spite of them. By ordering some of the melodramatic excesses cut, Major Funkhouser may have been an unwitting co-author of the picture's success. That

night in Orchestra Hall, and the reviews the next day, was Goldstein's vindication. He would never have another.<sup>172</sup>

Word came that his picture had finished a reasonably successful three-week run in Chicago and was now in Los Angeles, taken there by his west coast partners. He left New York for Los Angeles, prepared for yet another legal battle to regain control of his picture. When he finally made it to court, however, it was not as party to a civil suit, but as a defendant in Federal Court, charged with violation of the Espionage Act.

Goldstein had lost control of the corporation that had produced *The Spirit of '76*. The men who did attempted to make as much money as they could with their product. It was previewed to theatre owners, possibly with more edits in the picture to allow for more show times and a bigger gate. Goldstein restored cut material for the picture that would be reviewed and represent the Los Angeles premiere. It is impossible to say which of the possible versions of *The Spirit of '76* were the basis of the federal indictment—or, indeed, if any were. Goldstein claimed that the judge saw only two reels of the fourteen which carried the entire running time. He also claimed that scenes listed in the indictment never appeared in any version of the picture actually shown to an audience; they were never a part of the completed picture or they were cut to permit the Chicago run.

They were, however, listed in the corporation's production records, and in the script. Goldstein was convinced that the officers of his corporation had turned over these records to the prosecutors, who used them to build a case against a picture that no one had ever seen and against him for making it. He was the only person charged, of all those involved in making *The Spirit of '76*.

In his own defense he noted that even the inflammatory, censored material, which he was said to be guilty of filming, despite it never being seen by an audience, was true.

He was correct. Innocents *were* massacred by the King's soldiers and their allies at Cherry Valley. The prosecutors might have been pre-paraphrasing Stephen Colbert when they charged that the facts themselves were seditious.

One other possibility remains: that Goldstein himself replaced the censored footage. He denied this in his own account, but was reported testifying at the trial that he had indeed restored some if not all of the questionable footage—not to further seditious activity, but merely to put “pep” in the show. He may have thought that his picture, presented in its entirety, would speak for itself as the masterpiece he believed it to be; it needed the atrocities and the sexual excesses to arouse the emotions and channel them into patriotic fervor. His entire struggle had been to allow the picture to speak for itself. If that resulted directly in his indictment, there is nothing in his account to indicate any satisfaction in being himself the agent of his downfall, rather than a patsy for others.

Goldstein was indicted on two counts of violation of the Espionage Act. He had attempted to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny and refusal to do duty in the military and naval forces of the United States while the country was engaged in war, and he had in his possession property tending to cause such disloyalty, mutiny and insubordination. The prosecution charged that the censored scenes had been filmed with the intention of discrediting the new allies of the United States in the World War. The picture itself was placed in evidence and shown in court. Goldstein noted that the usual numbers of trail spectators increased at the prospect of a free movie, as well as the complimentary remarks of one of the onlookers.

On April 15, 1918, Robert Goldstein was found guilty on both counts. Two weeks later, he was sentenced to ten years confinement in the Federal Penitentiary on McNeil Island, Washington, and fined \$5,000. No one else was charged; the cast and crew were seen

as innocents, and the shareholders and partners were regarded as gulls of the mastermind Goldstein; that, or they made their own deals with the prosecutors. As well, participation in *The Spirit of '76* does not seem to have put anyone on a blacklist. The actors continued to work in the usual Hollywood manner; careers peaked at the acme of health and beauty and declined slowly afterwards: leading ladies and ingénues graduated to secretaries and mothers, then maids, then uncredited extras. There is no way of judging the aptness of their decline; like most old pictures, no print survives of *The Spirit of '76*, and very few reviews. It was apparently reviewed for a release in 1921, three years after the war's end; in what state we can not tell. It may have been cut to unintelligibility, fodder for a voracious trade that needed product to fill screens without regard to quality. It is also possible that what suited the reviewers in 1917 was pitifully old-fashioned and melodramatic in 1921:

. . . a crude concoction of fact and fiction . . . the acting belongs to its day, and serves to illustrate the vast improvement four years have brought. There is much sawing of the air with both hands, and rolling of the eyes.<sup>173</sup>

With a single reservation:

The performance of one member of the cast stands out from the otherwise unbroken level like a lofty mountain peak. George Cheeseborough as Walter N. Butler embraces in his work the best results of the latest methods of screen acting. . . . doing a cold-blooded murder with a calm indifference that seems as natural to him as the air he breathes. His knife fight to the death with an Indian is also in keeping with Butler's reputation . . . There is something predictive in everything he does.<sup>174</sup>

His performance may have benefited from not having to recite dialogue; the single surviving intertitle belongs to Butler:

*Your foul lies have aroused my wrath!*<sup>175</sup>

*Photoplay* was, if possible, even more dismissive:

. . . it resembles nothing so much as a fourteen reel Ben Turpin comedy without the talented Ben.<sup>176</sup>

By now, Robert Goldstein was out of prison, his sentence commuted in 1920 by Woodrow Wilson after three years imprisonment. He was already alienated from his family—at one time he thought his father was trying to have him killed—and he went to Europe to attempt to rebuild a career in pictures.

In 1924, I was making a film in Berlin. One day I had a phone call from Mr. Goldstein. My companion and I had dinner with him that night. He was the same gentle, soft-spoken man I had known so many years before. I never saw him again.

Jane Novak, *The Spirit of '76*'s Cecile Stewart, had been called as a witness for the prosecution in 1918, but there appears to appear to have been no enmity between them.

A few years later in 1927, Goldstein wrote to the newly founded Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, asking for justice. It was an extraordinary document, ninety-three pages long, quoted throughout this section, the sole account of the making of *The Spirit of '76*. There is no record of a response. By now D.W. Griffith, whom Goldstein feared as a rival and potential poacher of his subject, was himself facing the decline of his career; the careers of many of Goldstein's cast were fading as well; his letter from Germany must have seemed like an echo of a forgotten episode. He continued to write to the academy over the years, without response. His letters were filed.

How he survived in Germany for the fifteen years he lived there is unknown. He may have received a remittance from his family in California, but after a while even that may have ended.

In a letter to the Academy dated May 10, 1935, he writes

. . . because I can't pay \$9 to have my American passport renewed I have been fined 75 marks—and, as I consequently can't pay that either—two weeks in jail. I have received the order to deliver myself to jail next week or be punished . . . if you can't do anything else, put it in the papers. It is a swell piece of ironical news.<sup>177</sup>

This letter, thought to be the last of Goldstein's to be received by the Academy, and the likely fate of a jailed Jew in Germany in 1935, led researchers to assume that Goldstein died in the Holocaust, and many accounts record his fate thus. It would be a fittingly dark end for a victim of American hysteria, and elevate his misfortune to the point of tragedy.

Except there is a telegram, sent three years later, from New York City:

You will probably remember that I wrote you several times from Berlin during the fifteen years I stayed there. Since my enforced return here, three years ago, things have been going just as badly as they did in L.A. twenty years ago, when this very deplorable affair started.<sup>178</sup>

Apparently Goldstein was deported from Germany in 1935.

I have been treated so terribly here in New York that I am at my wit's end . . . There seems to be nothing I can do here to help myself.<sup>179</sup>

It is to be hoped that he lived long enough to know how much his luck had changed. This is the last note of him in the Academy's library. No other record of his later life exists.

Robert Goldstein is a footnote, a sidebar in American history. He made no lasting contribution to art other than his martyrdom at the altar of political hysteria. Historians grasping at examples of political oppression of the arts unearth him every so often and tell a small part of his story, often inaccurately. Until this paper, for example, no one seems to have noticed that his scenario was largely plagiarized from an author now equally obscure.

He was a showman more than he was an artist and an artist manqué more than an artist. A successful manager of the family costume business, he wanted more. He wrote about his love of the theatre, fostered at an early age by his mother, his own attempts at creating theatre works, and his frustration.

How many shows had he watched from in front and in back? How many rehearsals had he attended? And whether he was watching *Das Rheingold* from the fly gallery or listening to Paderewski from a paint bridge above the piano, or watching Masgani rehearse a Tchaikowski symphony with a double orchestra, or seeing *Cyrano de Bergerac* in the Burgtheater in Vienna, he

experienced every sensation, every thrill, every effect. They created a rhapsodic ecstasy in him which lasted with undiminished intensity for years.<sup>180</sup>

Yet, as he was, he was in a perfect position to partake of that world and contribute to it for the rest of his life. He had already experienced Olympian moments in the theatre. He seems capable of responding to genius, yet incapable of understanding that it was not among his gifts. With that understanding, he might have enjoyed a long and fulfilling association with the arts.

Goldstein's story is the common tale of ambition unmatched by talent, or even mere resilience. There is nothing in Goldstein's memoir to indicate that he ever thought of starting over in another role, or at the bottom. Once down, he could never rebound.<sup>181</sup>

The lightness of Goldstein's ambition—he wanted to make a picture because he wanted to make a picture—is shown in the synopsis he wrote of the screenplay, and his subsequent description of the nature of the cuts. He was certain that the cuts detract from the power of the picture, but only because they remove visceral images of murder and rapine. The scenes do not seem integral to the theme of the picture as a vision of American history. Cherry Valley is not an actual place with people, but a place where victims live, whose suffering is important only in the fact that it portrays the dastardliness of the villains. A British soldier is shown bayoneting an infant; the infant did not exist before the scene and the grief of its passing does not last past the scene's end. It is not a life at all, but a trigger to evoke emotion; it is an infant, rather than a child or a puppy, because the emotion sought is more visceral.

Up to this time, the people who chose to retell the story of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk Valley settlements had some tie to the place, real or imaginative. The local historians were commemorating the story of their families. Harold Frederic may have found



the matter for his novel at one of these commemorations, adding it to the stories of his own home place. Alonzo Chappell made his living evoking the spirit of those pioneers, but he might have made a living painting pictures of Manfred or Rob Roy; he chose the American past. Even Robert Chambers had a tie to the Mohawk settlements, living within the watershed in a historic house. Perhaps he mined that vein of local lore because it was fresh and unexploited, and used it to salt his melodrama characters with a glimmer of the heroic American past, giving them a thoroughly unwarranted sheen of respectability.

Goldstein used this matter at third hand. He borrowed Chambers' plots and characters, having no knowledge of them other than the page. He cannot have unconsciously; the correspondence is too exact.

Goldstein did not want the past; he wanted pep. He only wanted to make a picture to excite people, and succeeded more than he could have imagined. He was not an artist, but became a martyr to a cause he did not know existed and would not have willingly joined. He has earned the immortality of the footnote.

*Superficial students of Goldstein's film note its similarities to D.W. Griffith's America and suppose that Griffith was aware of The Spirit of '76 and used some of it. In fact, it was Goldstein who copied—stole—Griffith's storytelling techniques and copied—stole—from Griffith's screenwriter. That such a discussion can be set down at this point indicates just how far the culture has come from the respectful stories created by the descendants of the settlers of Cherry Valley, the artistic homage of Frederic, and the lip service of Chambers.*

*Goldstein's epic had a very good chance to be the dominant cultural face of the matter of Cherry Valley. The reviews from Chicago indicate some perceived worth in 1917, and the story was no more banal than epics before and soon afterward. Only a combination of financial malpractice and government censorship prevented it from reaching the cultural marketplace. Indeed, the wonder of his story is how so slight a figure*

*could have persisted so long in the face of such opposition—and that, eight years later, another showman would try to repeat his folly.*

## Chapter Seven: Robert W. Chambers, 1917-1921

There is nothing to indicate that Robert W. Chambers ever saw Robert Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76*. It may not even have been shown east of Chicago. It is possible Chambers heard of the trial; his clipping service might provide him with a small packet of stories from the trades: plot synopses, cast lists—from which the names of Walter Butler and Catherine Montour might awaken a proprietary interest in him. A call or two to some friends in the picture business—by 1918 six of his books had been filmed—might disclose some inside information. He may have wondered if his name would arise in court, and if a connection with Goldstein might endanger his sales or his freedom.

His own *The Hidden Children* had been filmed in 1917, but that was mainly about fighting the Iroquois, a thoroughly safe enemy, and the Tories, who, no one seemed to realize, were now Canadians. He was working on the book that was to be his last top ten bestseller, *In Secret*, a spy thriller, and he may have decided to stick to the present and the distant European past for a while. He did not return to the New York frontier until 1921, the year Robert Goldstein was released from prison.

*The Little Red Foot* is the last of the Cardigan novels about the New York frontier. Most of it takes place in the period of political hostility and maneuver before the outbreak of the Revolution. The hero, John Drogue, is an American agent working against the power of the British Indian department on the Mohawk frontier. One of the men he works against is Walter Butler, who makes no appearance in the novel, but has a presence nonetheless. In his travels, Drogue stops at Cherry Valley. He stays at the home of his friends, the Wells family, praising their hospitality, describing them individually by name. Leaving the town, he looks back, recognizing the homes of his friends—the Wellses, the Campbells, the Clydes, the Reverend Mr. Dunlap—the dead.

That is my memory of Cherry Valley in the sunny tranquility of late afternoon, where tasseled corn like ranks of plumed Indians, covered vale and hillock; and clover and English grass grew green again after the first haying; and on some orchard trees the summer apples glimmered rosy ripe or lush gold among the leaves;—ah, God!—if I could have known what another year was to bring to Cherry Valley!<sup>182</sup>

An American Eden, to be despoiled within the year. These are brave, sturdy pioneers. Their young men are off fighting in the north, marching to Oriskany. Unguarded, in a post of danger, they remain true to their cause and their calling in the wilderness. It is as near as Chambers gets to acknowledging the victims of history as something more than elements of a plot.

The mass of settlers in the Mohawk are described by Chambers as weak and unresolved without a leader to guide them. The Cherry Valley people are an exception, resolute even without their leaders— but then they are British. The Mohawk Valley settlers are mainly German Palatines and Dutch, a lesser breed altogether who need the likes of John Drogue, the disinherited Lord Stormont, to rally and rescue them. If the need was not there, he would not be the hero, and without a hero, you cannot write a novel.

The old habits die hard. Drogue mentions Jane Wells, calling her Janet, and making her a young coquette of the court of Sir William Johnson, a flirt who gives him a sly kiss at farewell. Which, by Chamber's reckoning, seems to make her death that more tragic than the death of the old maid living with her brother's family, Jane Campbell's friend.

The sun sank blood-red behind the unbroken forests, and the sky over  
Cherry Valley seemed to be all afire as I turned away and entered the twilight  
of the woods . . . <sup>183</sup>

There is no appearance by Walter Butler; only his victims and his myrmidons—Captain Hare and Sergeant Newberry, Tory rangers caught and hanged by Clinton's men as spies. Butler's

own death appears in a postscript to the main action of the novel, which gives the whole thing a somewhat subdued air. At last Butler's victims get more space than his gaudy villainy. Chambers may have begun to turn against glamorizing the kind of people you hope never to meet in person; he would state that, obliquely but clearly, some years later. This was the last of his novels to deal with the New York revolutionary frontier, and the monster of Cherry Valley, but he was not done with Butler yet.

## Chapter Eight: D.W. Griffith: *America*, or *The Sacrifice*, 1924

Robert Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76* seems now like a dress rehearsal by understudies for the real performance that followed seven years later. The basic elements—the Chambers story, Griffith's epic vision—were repeated, but by the professionals. Chambers himself wrote the screenplay; Griffith himself produced and directed it. Important civic groups encouraged Griffith to make it. The US Army supplied a cavalry squadron for the production. Griffith's *America* had the sponsorship and endorsement of the guardians of American national culture.

The long transformation of the story, from local history into incorporation into the national story, was now undertaken in a deliberate way, no longer left to the byways of chance or the creative impulse of a single author. A consensus was reached by a group of creators, working to a higher purpose. That higher purpose was a reaction to the modernism introduced into American culture by the stresses of war, urbanization and industrialism. Americans would be reminded of what was called “normalcy”—the isolated, pastoral roots of American society. The story of *Cherry Valley*, represented by its most notorious protagonist, was about to become a given and familiar element in the mass culture. America's greatest director of motion pictures was filming a screenplay by one of the country's most prolific and best-selling authors. What could possibly go wrong? The answer to that cannot be understood without an understanding of the moving picture business as it existed in 1924, and the means by which its most celebrated creator rose to the top of his profession, and tried to maintain his pre-eminence.

It was not, as so many think, that David Wark Griffith invented the modern moving picture, or even its techniques. The close-up, which allows an unparalleled display of emotive states in a theatre, and the edit, which allows film to tell a story without shooting in exact sequence, were all developed at the turn of the century by others. Griffith's innovation was to use these techniques to create what he sometimes called a picture play. He merged the techniques of the stage into the medium of the moving picture. The spectacle for which he is

so famous is a small part of that; his real achievement was to find a way to allow actors to work in film.

In a scene from 1915's *The Birth of a Nation*, Lillian Gish searches an army hospital for a loved one. As Gish walked through a ward an extra with expressive eyes, playing a guard, was looking at her. Griffith noticed it and moved the camera and did the scene again. He had Gish walk a little more slowly and told the extra to look at her and sigh. She is still preoccupied and worried, but now a man is looking at her and feeling the power of her ethereal charm. Gish recalled afterwards that the scene got the biggest laugh of the movie. It is not an obtrusive laugh. Gish is worried and sad, yes, and yes, a moon-eyed private looks up and sees her, the most beautiful woman he's ever seen, and she walks by and he watches her go and he will never see her again, and he sighs. Two notes of pathos, major and minor, one underscoring the other—it is a rueful, empathetic laugh, relieving a moment of sadness.

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That was what Griffith did. There was screen drama before *The Birth of a Nation*, some of it Griffith's, and it was usually adequate and often very good, but it seems like something that happened while the camera was pointed at it. What happens in *The Birth of a Nation* is never an accident, or luck. Many of the best directors were actors, like Griffith. Week after week in a run, they would watch their fellow actors and see something new or fresh that they brought to a part, a part they might have walked through, or do the same thing they did in the matinee in the last town, doing something now for pride or the company. The audience might miss it. Looking at the moments that Griffith captured, you might think that he was determined that they would never miss it again. The actors did not. Then and for the rest of his life, long after his career ended, Griffith's actors were devoted to him.

Griffith's real innovation was the marriage of intimacy and spectacle. He brought the acting moment with him when he graduated to the spectacle. The model for the spectacle was the large scale productions coming out of Italy, like *Cabiria* in 1914; their big moments were screen-filling epic visions of great masses of people. One of the big moments of *The Birth of a Nation* is a soldier returned from the war, standing hesitantly at his front door; the door opens and loving hands reach forth to draw him in.

It is difficult now to understand the impact of *The Birth of a Nation* in its time. Today it is largely viewed as a relic of racism, or a quaint example of what diverted our grandfathers. In its time, no one denied its power, especially those who regretted that it had ever been made. Most Americans heretofore went to pictures and saw a feature that lasted less than an hour. Like the short subjects shown before and after, the feature showed at most half a dozen actors recreating a stage play on a set or two. Little or no effort was made to tell the story through action created for the screen, except in comedies, which is why they were more popular and why they hold up so much better today

It came to a largely unsophisticated audience, which might see a forty-five minute three-reel movie, with two sets and half a dozen actors, once or twice a month. To this audience Griffith brought a *gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art: two and a half hours of intimate drama and sweeping spectacle, accompanied by a carefully chosen music score. To all but the sense-deadened, it must been overwhelming.

The permanent impact was even deeper. Motion pictures today are pretty much set in the mold that Griffith created. Pictures are judged by their ability to fulfill expectations created by him. Every picture maker of his time set out to do what Griffith did. That was in 1915. By 1923, they were, and Griffith was in trouble. The thing he alone could do in 1915 could now be done by many. The most gifted of his followers—spiritual heirs, not



imitators—was preparing his own epic about the transcontinental railroad, *The Iron Horse*. John Ford was twenty years younger than Griffith, as were many of the men making pictures now, and Griffith must have noticed that his fellow directors were getting younger every year. He was treated with respect, but it had been a while since he had been regarded as a force to be feared.

Griffith's actors were starting to drift away. Lillian Gish had been a part of every successful movie he'd made, including the recent *Broken Blossoms*, *Way Down East* and *Orphans of the Storm*, but another actress had become prominent in Griffith's life, Carol Dempster—to whom may be applied the ominous words *He loved her and would make her a star*. Gish saw it coming and started to make her own plans. Ethereal was a word often applied to Lillian Gish. She was physically slight, a type of the 1910's who would extend her career well into the 1920's through careful role choices and a well concealed toughness—she'd spent hours doing her own stuntwork in *Way Down East*, on a real ice floe on the real White River. Not so much a movie star as a dominant player, she could command a scene lying down.

Dempster was a more modern type, more openly athletic and physical. She was not the talent Gish was, but neither was anyone else. She was at her best in modern dramas like Griffith's *Isn't Life Wonderful?*, playing a young woman in postwar Germany, in love with a dispirited war veteran, played by Neil Hamilton. The climax of the picture shows them retrieving a store of potatoes and taking them to market in a wheelbarrow, only to be attacked by a hungry mob who mistake them for hoarders. This was a long way from the historical melodrama and spectacle that marked the middle of Griffith's career, and much closer to his beginnings, when he shot on real locations with real people in the background. *Isn't Life Wonderful?* was shot in Germany, and the extras look hungry because they *are*

hungry; the potato riot shoot needed a constant resupply of potatoes. Had Griffith followed this course, showing real people in present time, his career might not have ended in the 20's. Unfortunately for Griffith, Dempster and Hamilton, *Isn't Life Wonderful?* was the *second* movie they made together in 1924.

The year before, Will Hays, Warren Harding's Postmaster General and now the head of the MPPDA—a front created by the movie industry as a sop to the outcry against its preceived moral laxity—approached with a suggestion that had come from the Daughters of the American Revolution. As a contribution to the struggle to support American ideals against the forces threatening yet again to subvert them, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributers Association asked Griffith to seriously consider making a movie about the American Revolution, and its heroes and ideals.

The proposal, with its implicit recognition of him as a senior statesman of the profession, appealed to Griffith, as did the subject matter. His last historical, *Orphans of the Storm*, had done well. His first thought was to adapt Clyde Fitch's 1898 play *Nathan Hale*, despite its having been filmed in 1916 as *The Heart of a Hero*. There was a romantic subplot pairing Hale with his cousin Alice Adams—a good part for Dempster—and it had a theatrical track record. But it was a small, intimate drama, ending in 1776, and Griffith seems to have already decided that his picture would have a grander scale, encompassing the entire revolution. His first instinct may have been the right one; Fitch's *Beau Brummell*, starring John Barrymore, was filmed that same year and did well.<sup>185</sup>

An actor picks up a paperback in an airport; by the time he lands, he's decided to adapt it for the screen. Someone remembers an old movie and decides to remake it. How works are brought to the attention of the people who can film them is a subject that shows the purest workings of chance. In Griffith's case, it might have been a cheap edition on a

boarding house shelf, read while he was “resting”, or left behind in a dressing room or a railway coach. One of his staff might have brought it to him, and, doing what a producer is paid for, making decisions, Griffith ended discussion and turned all that talk into action. However it happened, Griffith decided to use *The Reckoning*, by Robert W. Chambers, as the basis of his Revolutionary War epic, and to hire Mr. Chambers to adapt his novel for the screen.

In my life I have known two or three people who it is *always* a pleasure to see.

Mr. Griffith is one of them.—Robert W. Chambers<sup>186</sup>

Perhaps it was the memory of his brief theatrical career, now suddenly and unexpectedly revived, that moved Chambers to such feeling. Richard Schickel, Griffith’s biographer, regards Chambers as a mediocre writer, but . .

As a man, however, he is one of the most engaging characters to have crossed Griffith’s path. At 58, ten years older than Griffith, he had learned what Griffith never did: to accept his limitations and enjoy the pleasures a prosperous career had brought. Hard-working and hard-pressed financially, Griffith took to the easy-going and cheerful Chambers as he did to few outsiders . . . Chambers responded with affectionate admiration to Griffith’s ambitions and energy. And with bemusement to the extravagances and confusions of movie production . . .<sup>187</sup>

Indeed, Chambers was neither the first nor last to view the backstage of an entertainment and feel that the audience had paid to see the wrong show. As a recreation from his scriptwriting, and his writing of the tie-in book of the movie (for it was starting to look very unlike like his original novel) Chambers wrote a skit depicting life on the set of *America*. Schickel describes it as near-absurdist and satirical, but it is so in the way that most accurate depictions of movie-making appear, however serious their intent, and whenever they are written. He also describes it, alone of all the contents of the catalogs of letters and papers Griffith left to the Museum of Modern Art, as “ . . . the only entirely charming and cheering

document.” In it, Chambers depicted the activity on a typical Griffith set:

*Place: Mamaroneck.*

*Scene: The Studio at Orienta Point.*

*Time: Any hour.*

*Amid great noise and confusion, 16 sets are being built, ten of them gold-plated. Sound of hammering and a cat fight. Several heavy objects fall with sickening crashes.*

Griffith’s mania for historical accuracy:

D.W.: Be kind enough to find out for me how many buttons Sam Adams wore on his underwear.

PELL: Immediately, sire. Do you mean his winter underwear?

D.W.: Both. I am always thorough. Also find out if Sam Adams burst off any buttons on the Nineteenth of April. You can’t tell what fright will do to a man’s underwear. Where’s Blondy?

PELL: Gold plating the Woolworth Building.

His exuberance:

D.W.: ‘Tis well, faithful, trusty Blondy! [*Bursts into song:*] My Blondy, I admire him much,/Much more than Chambers, Pell, and Such....

His substance abuse:

D.W.: [*Fumbles in his pockets.*] My God! I had 200 cigarettes an hour ago! Send somebody for 200 more!

His mania for historical accuracy, tempered by the needs of the drama

D.W.: Get that manuscript of Mr. Chambers’, tear up all except the preface, and send that to Harold Bell Wright to revise. I’ll teach him that the Revolutionary War was fought in Kentucky and was not a naval action on the Erie Canal!

D.W.: You talk like Chambers! Be a man. Emancipate yourself from a bigoted passion for facts!

D.W.: I have it on the best authority that machine guns were used at the Battle of Yorktown! Mr. Pell, please get Lossing.

Griffith’s devoted staff:

PELL: I’ve got a lot of whale stuff we cut out of *Down to the Sea*. Why not have a whale attack Washington crossing the Delaware?

D.W.: Very well. Make some inserts of those relics that Cap’n Pell discovered at Valley Forge. Put five cameras on the clam. Then get the twig of the tree under which Washington said his prayers. What else did Mr. Pell discover?

SUCH: The brush and comb of Charles the Bald, and sixteen volumes of

speeches by William the Silent.

His actors:

BLONDY: Sire, Mr. Walheim is talking Ancient Egyptian, and all the lady extras have swooned.

His relationship with writers:

*Enter Robert W Chambers.*

CHAMBERS: This movie business is very fatiguing. I feel, naturally enough, the whole weight and responsibility of this picture rests on my shoulders. Of course I get some assistance from D.W. The others do their best. But a creative mind is always a lonely one, and I must try to bear my inevitable intellectual solitude.

*The icy silence is shattered by the chaotic cataclysms of Mr. Walheim. Sets tremble. The patent floor heaves. D.W seizes a Sheraton blackjack and lays Mr. Chambers low.*

Chambers' delight at his new company extended to the writing of the movie tie-in novel. His hero, a dispatch rider for the Congress, travels throughout the Colonies on his duties. One such duty has him carrying orders to

A certain Captain, John Pell . . . who promised me that I should soon hear of him, and also of a fellow skipper of his, one Captain David Griffith, . . .<sup>188</sup>

And to

A new company of rangers forming under a Major Such . . . and his officers; Captain Barrymore; Lieutenants Alderson, Mack and Hamilton; his Ensign, Mr. Dewy; and his first Sergeant, Blondy;. . .<sup>189</sup>

John Pell was the picture's historical advisor; David Griffith was the director. Herbert Sutch was the man in charge of Griffith's army of assistant directors. Lionel Barrymore, Erville Alderson, Charles Emmett Mack, Neil Hamilton and Arthur Dewey were the male leads. William J. "Blondy" Bantell was the studio art department's director of construction. The play's offstage noise "Walheim" was second villain Louis Wolheim, a character actor who filled the kinds of roles inherited by Wallace Beery and Ernest Borgnine.

Perhaps it was the happy, cheerful shoot that Chambers' skit suggests. Nearly

everyone knew everyone else through work, either with Griffith or before. Lionel Barrymore had persuaded his friend Louis Wolheim to change his career from teacher to actor; nearly all their scenes were with each other. Griffith was returning to the kind of grand historical epic that had made his name, at the behest of the best elements of society, and they were all along for the ride. He was also working with an actress with whom he was in love.

The story, recognizable to anyone who knows Chambers' work, can be told in brief. Nathan Holden, a poor farmer and dispatch rider for the Massachusetts Committee of Safety, loves the high-born Virginia belle Nancy Montague. Her father opposes Holden and the cause he works for. At the outbreak of conflict at Lexington, Holden stands with the militia against the British regulars; the Montagues are lodging at the village inn, on their way to their family retreat in the Mohawk Valley. Also figuring in the story is the Indian Agent Captain Walter Butler, who is in Boston urging the British commanders to adopt vigorous repression of the rebels, including unrestricted Indian warfare. He meets Nancy Montague there and makes love to her; she and her father are very impressed with Captain Butler.

In the early fighting Nancy realizes her love for Holden. Holden wounds, by accident, her father, and Nancy's brother Charles, inspired by his respect for their friend and neighbor George Washington, joins the patriots and dies bravely at Bunker Hill. The Montagues leave Boston for the Mohawk, and Holden joins the army. A year passes.

Butler's army of Indians and renegades ravage the New York frontier, raiding patriots and loyalists alike. Montague now rejects Butler's advances to his daughter, calling him the butcher of Cherry Valley, and Butler takes him and Nancy prisoner. Holden arrives in the valley with his cavalry troop; while attempting to rescue Nancy, he learns of an invasion of the valley. Torn but resolved to do his duty, he leaves to warn the valley and rally resistance. Butler's invasion is repulsed, Nancy and her father escape, Butler is killed and the

lovers reunited at war's end in time to cheer Washington's inauguration.

It is not difficult to see why commentators unfamiliar with Chambers' body of work might think that Griffith had used the plotlines of *The Spirit of '76* as an inspiration for *America*. Robert Goldstein's screenplay had plagiarized Chambers' works; Chambers rewrote bits from his own novels into a new work, designed to incorporate the basic plot of his 1907 novel *The Reckoning* with Griffith's need to include as many historical setpieces as possible. So had Goldstein, but Chambers at least tried to use the Holden character and his role as a dispatch rider to tie them together. He rides to Virginia to tell the House of Burgesses of the crisis in Boston, in time to see Patrick Henry pledge Liberty or Death. He is in Lexington and receives the end warning of Paul Revere's ride—as in *The Spirit of '76*, a dramatic high point, particularly since Griffith used a wild Irish hunter barely under the control of its rider. The action runs logically from Lexington Green to Bunker Hill and is dramatically coherent; the love story—the love of a poor but honest Patriot for a high-born Tory girl—however clichéd, is an effective cliché.<sup>190</sup>

The second half of the picture, set in the Mohawk Valley, is problematical. The straightforward historical drama turns melodramatic. We are asked to believe that the Revolution's real crisis is provoked by a renegade Indian Agent attempting to create his own empire on the frontier, rather like a Finger Lakes Colonel Kurtz. The climatic battle of the picture, and thus the Revolution, is the siege of a frontier fort. The surrender at Yorktown appears afterwards as a vignette; those unfamiliar with American history might mistake it for a result. Chambers' original stories were regional historical romances that Griffith tries to stretch into a national epic. But that was not the only stretch.

*America* suffers from a void at its center: parts that call for stars are played by actors. Neil Hamilton enjoyed a long career; that year he had a notable success, with his co-star in

*America* Carol Dempster, in the modern drama *Isn't Life Wonderful?* Six years later, sound firmly established, he played an embittered squadron commander in Howard Hawks' *Dawn Patrol*, another adult, modern role, with a fine voice. As a silent actor, in melodrama, he seems to struggle to express himself, or possibly he's struggling under Griffith's direction. One particularly emotive scene has him thrashing his arms about in despair at his having to choose to rescue his cause or his love. The scene is adopted from a play Griffith wrote in 1908, and it looks its age.

Carol Dempster was disliked by some of Griffith's veterans. They accused her of imitating the actresses of his stock company—Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh and Miriam Cooper. This is unfair; she was tall and dark like Cooper, she may not have consciously tried to act like Marsh—possibly Griffith directed her in the same way, and Gish was simply inimitable. Her struggle here seems to be that of an actress suited to modern roles attempting historical melodrama, which has a different call upon talent. The gowns and hairpieces she is smothered in do little to disguise her imposture.

Ingmar Bergman noted that the one absolute requirement for a star is danger. The converse of that may be the old remark about Douglas Fairbanks: *He smiles, and you're relieved*. Griffith said of John and Lionel Barrymore circa 1910 that they could stop traffic on Broadway simply by walking down the sidewalk together.<sup>191</sup> A decade later Lionel Barrymore played Walter Butler in *America*, and one can see the truth of that remark still, and danger.

*America* was the midpoint of his movie career; he had already made 106 pictures and would make 107 more. He was 46, nearly twice the age of his two co-stars, and a year younger than Griffith.

Yet the physical strain of Lionel Barrymore's performance must in itself be enormous. How his voice can bear up all evening under Neri's hoarse roars of rage and reverberating bellows of geniality is one of the great wonders of



the age. Not an extraordinarily big man in reality, he seems tremendous as he swaggers about the stage; in his fight scene, he goes through a mass formation of supernumeraries much as Elmer Oliphant used to go through the Navy line. And in some strange way, he manages to make the character almost likeable.

Thus Dorothy Parker reviewed Barrymore in *The Jest* in 1919, a celebrated melodrama which featured John as a frail young poet and Lionel as a brutal condottieri who victimizes him in Medici Florence. There is nothing left of it now but the reviews and a yellowing play text, but the description above needs but a change of name to describe Barrymore's Walter Butler. The upright and honorable characters in Boston and the bestial menials on the frontier do not stand a chance of being noticed beside him. He does not use cheap stunts to steal scenes; his carriage and bearing arrest the eye at once. Even standing still he seems to pulse with life and when he speaks the picture is no longer silent. You know his voice, even if you have heard it once, and the words you hear are in the language of unbridled will and sensuality. In the phrase of the theatre, he takes the stage.



Griffith knew this. They had worked together since 1908, when Barrymore, after a sabbatical from acting to pursue painting, came to Griffith for work to pay the bills. He gave Barrymore few close-ups, but filmed him as much as possible full body or from the waist up, taking advantage of Barrymore's complete mastery of movement and his willingness to go beyond the bounds of realism to make the melodramatic material work. It is something of a shock to see him this quick and vigorous after growing up on his Old Man Potter.

However, his performance seriously upsets the balance of the picture. In *The Jest* he played a very similar character, opposite his brother John Barrymore. In *America*, the opposing balance is Neil Hamilton, who never shares a scene with him, and a series of older character actors, who all seem to take a step back in his presence, and Carol Dempster, who seems to have never seen anything like him up close. At one point he sweeps her up in his arms and proceeds up the stairs with every sign of appreciation for what he is about to receive. We are on the verge of another, more exciting picture, when Joseph Brant makes his appearance, summoning Butler to war with prim disapproval. Butler



resignedly sets down his after dinner entertainment and goes off to ravage the Mohawk Valley.

Brant in this picture is as proud and dignified a figure as Washington. Most of the Iroquois are half-naked, painted demons; Brant is right out of the Romney portrait, enrobed and wearing the feathered turban of

his rank, insistent on his equality with Butler, even to his face, but there is nothing more than a cameo. The Iroquois exist only as something to give Butler power and influence.

Brant is also a tell for Griffith's wavering attention to historical accuracy, alluded to in Chambers' skit. There is Brant's appearance, and the sets for the streets of colonial

Boston, and the long shots of raiding Iroquois, all of which suggest the reality as well or better than modern efforts. Then there is also the dress of Butler's Scottish allies, uniformly kilted and bonneted like Harry Lauder. Nathan Holden at Lexington stops and takes the pose of Daniel French's Minute Man statue at Concord Bridge. The frequent intertitles report the significance of historical detail.

An intertitle also informs us of the untrue fact that Butler has disobeyed his orders from Royal authority and is establishing his own empire on the frontier. The most readily available version of *America* is the Kino DVD. It is far superior to the earlier videotape, which includes the error of a reel shown out of sequence, further muddling the narrative. The Kino transfer may be the version of the film shown in Great Britain, considerably sanitized of any matter which might upset the British viewing public or the official censor. It lacks footage of the scenes shot and credited showing Nancy Montague being presented to George III at court, a goggling Beefeater and a mitred bishop looking on. The costumes alone suggest that the scene was expensive, and it is doubtful Griffith would have cut it for any other reason.<sup>192</sup> If the DVD shows the British version, Butler's turning outlaw salves the conscience of the audience, and the umbrage of the censor, who might otherwise see atrocities performed under Royal authority and command.

One such atrocity shows civilians being driven into a house and the house set on fire. It is genuinely harrowing; as the flames work up the wall of the house, people are seen at the window, trying to escape. It is a simple but very effective special effect. It also probably never happened. Chambers never mentioned such an act, and long afterwards, reporters looking for a real life counterpart for an atrocity in *The Patriot* failed to find it as well.

Butler's freelance empire-building is little more than the addition of a single intertitle and it may have appeared in the US release as well. Griffith was not that much of a stickler

for strict historical detail; he liked getting the uniforms right but larger issues escaped him.<sup>193</sup>

If Butler's turning rogue removed some of the point of revolution against Britain, it added much to Barrymore's portrayal; it makes him every kind of outlaw.

The picture ends with Holden rescuing Nancy and her father from the raiders led by Captain Hare—a character based on the actual Lt. Ralph Hare, who rescued civilians at Cherry Valley and was later hanged as a spy, with some basis, and as a murderer of innocents at Cherry Valley, with very little basis.

Hare is played by Louis Wolheim, frequently appearing stripped to the waist, a blanket tied Indian-style over his shoulders, his face painted half-heartedly. His body recalls that of a professional wrestler gone to seed, as does his characterization: a cheerful second villain playing comic relief to Barrymore's lead. It is not a happy moment when the leer is wiped off his face by the righteous Neil Hamilton as



Holden. After throttling him with a horse-pistol, Holden turns to find his love and her father embracing him in love and reconciliation.

The raiders are defeated and pursued. Butler, on horseback, rallies his men in retreat, and shouts defiance to the pursuing militia, mocking them. He dismounts in flagrant contempt of their closeness, to take water from a brook in a little silver cup. Cut to the militia, firing at him—and here we see an Indian among them; Griffith's only depiction of the Oneidas who allied themselves to the Patriot cause. His presence is necessary for the next shot: Butler falls into the brook, riddled with bullets, and it is the Indian who grabs his body by the neck, lifting him out of the water for . . . For a moment, we see a scene that



could have been taken from Timothy Dwight's report of Samuel Kirkland's relation of Butler's death. The history would suggest a scalping to ensue, which historically a frontier white was as ready and willing to do as an Oneida, but not in this picture. The scene abruptly ends before the knives appear.

Later writers—Richard Schickel, Garry Wills—would say that in this picture Griffith eschews the blatant racism that disfigures *The Birth of a Nation*, but it is never very far from hand. The black servants of the Montagues display the canine servility towards their masters that Griffith seemed to think was their only virtue, and they are still white actors in blackface; bad, shiny blackface at that. The Iroquois take their place as Other. Joseph Brant is the Noble Indian, living up to his reputation, but he hasn't much time onscreen.

The Iroquois who guards Nancy in the captured Montague house is around twice as long. The actor playing him seems to be wearing a bald cap covering a wealth of hair; his head in profile has a strange elongated shape, slanting back diagonally, more disquieting than Frankenstein's monster.

Butler in his wilderness court is surrounded by men and women meant to represent the human dimension of the frontier encounter: the mixed races and the people who create them. The women are squalid and blank-faced, and the men are in the grip of a wholly unnatural excitement, their faces fixed in a manic grin reminiscent of Gwynplaine. If it is not the vicious racism of *The Birth of a Nation*, it is the simpleminded bigotry that panders to the needs of a not especially bright mass audience for a safe, historically distant enemy that they can hate without fear of retribution.



Butler dies and goes to Hell. There is little doubt of that; he told Nancy, before she passed out, not to pray, since God is —and here he mimes the three monkeys: hands over eyes, hands over ears, hand over mouth—blind, deaf and dumb. He shows no remorse in his final moments, laughing in the face of defeat and death. He dies suddenly and in his prime: brave, handsome, defiant.



There may have been more picture, but all we see now is two tableaux. The first is the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, well detailed and faithful to history. Also faithful in detail is the next scene of Washington's inauguration in New York, which actually happened eight years later, cheered by the Montagues and Holden, completely reconciled. One can almost hear the stirring in the seats and the gathering of overcoats.

The picture, as critics noted, is basically schizophrenic. The first part manages to get through the tale of the mismatched lovers and their perils among history, but the second part is all driven by Butler; the dread of what he'll do and then him doing it. It might have been better as two pictures, as well as fairer to the unfortunate actors saddled with an unworkable script.

*America* was to be Griffith's last chance to return to the prominence he had enjoyed a few years before. Hereafter the projects would be smaller. He was unable to make a virtue of necessity and return to the intimate details of everyday life that had made up the beginning

of his career. He had brought these details to the epic film, grounding it in human reality. Now he had reached a point where he seemed to have forgotten those basic human realities, or forgotten how to bring them to the screen. Garry Wills, writing of *America* and comparing it to Griffith's hallmark epic, said that

. . . *America* has a more interesting relationship to its historical materials than does *The Birth of a Nation*, and it achieves a more satisfying unity. . . . This is the film that should have been called *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>194</sup>

Wills approaches it from a historian's point of view, and a polemicist's—the picture gets more facts right, and is not as overtly racist. Wills may have been so busy making notes that he did not notice that the picture doesn't work. It is the type of virtuous, boring picture that wins an Oscar for good intentions and that no one watches twice. In the end, it made a profit, but a small one, and it took too long to do so for it to do Griffith any good with his money troubles. Part of the profit factor included sales of second unit footage for re-use in later pictures, the artistic equivalent of asset stripping.<sup>195</sup> He would lose the studio and his career effectively ended six years after *America*'s release. Living on like a ghost at the banquet, he would visit the Hollywood studios and old friends working, never working himself.<sup>196</sup>

The meaning of *America* is the story of a counterfeit of a counterfeit. Robert Chambers may have used real people for his fictional stories, and recreated them to match a hack's formula for meeting the needs of the market, but he seemed to be aware of how far he was diverging from reality. He finally seemed to know that he had gone too far. In *The Little Red Foot* he has his hero visit Cherry Valley before the raid, describing the homely village on the edge of settlement—on the edge of eternity, awaiting a dreadful visitation from the darkness beyond. He and we know that something terrible will happen to these people. However late it was done, it was still an attempt to focus on the victims of the horrors of war instead of the agents of that horror. He had used Walter Butler at first as

Harold Frederic had, a fallen angel whose fall was regretted by his friends, even when they did not regret his death, an example of a lost class of men. Then he used him as a counterpoint to the hero in *The Reckoning*, in which he played his largest role for Chambers. Since the novel began as a historical society romance, it was necessary to make Butler a fixture in society, capable of charming a lord's daughter into clandestine betrothal. Since the hero was his enemy, and the struggle mortal, it was necessary to make him powerful. In this way, almost driven by the demands of the formulas by which he worked, Chambers made Butler evil, seductive, and strong; in Bergman's word, dangerous. He made Butler a star, but then turned away from him and used him little afterwards.

For the historian, Griffith's sin is greater than Chambers'. Chambers elaborated upon a legend from his own home place, keeping the outlines of reality, or at least traditional reality. This was not much different from what Griffith did in *The Birth of a Nation*. His father had been a Confederate officer who resisted Reconstruction, like the heroic Klansmen in his son's picture. Griffith could not understand the uproar about the picture—he was simply telling the truth as he grew up hearing it, and as many tenured partisans—and Woodrow Wilson—had written and taught it for years. That family history may have helped him instill the depth of feeling *The Birth of a Nation* still has. He believed that the story he was telling was true; that is the picture's sole absolution.

*America* has no such justification. Griffith made it to make money, not truth. History in this picture is a genuine old frame, cleaned and restored, placed around a fake painting. He needed a hit, he needed to make his mistress a star, but he did not need to make this picture. Robert Goldstein had not a fraction of Griffith's talent, or his business skill, but he needed to make *The Spirit of '76* for reasons that he barely understood, and his story arouses pity. The story of Griffith's picture seems less like artistic overreaching and more like a real



estate speculation that did not get rezoned. The core of the story—Chambers’ story of the defense of the New York frontier—was a hook upon which Griffith could hang the elements that paid off for him so many times before.

What art remains, is personal. Griffith’s villains are often seducers, but rarely seductive. *The Birth of a Nation*’s Silas Lynch is a heavy slow-moving lech who forces the women he can never attract. Even more appalling is the simply named Gus, an ex-slave free to pursue the virginal Mae Marsh to her fate better than rape. Like all the other black characters, Gus is played by a white man, Walter Long, in heavy blackface minstrel makeup. At one point in his chase, he stands in the shadow of a rocky outcropping; no adjustment is made for the change in lighting, which suddenly negates the makeup—the bestial black man is revealed as white man in disguise.

One of the uses of art is to allow the artist to do that which he would never dare to do in real life. Critics attempting to psychoanalyze the racism of *The Birth of a Nation* and men like Griffith consider their worst fears about blacks to be the projection of their worst fears about themselves. Watching Barrymore’s Walter Butler, we see a handsome and dynamic man in his prime, a leader of men and a magnet to women. Neil Hamilton recalled talking to Charles Mack during the shoot; discussing an “elderly” friend of theirs, whose age was 45 years. Griffith, all of 47, overheard them and raised his voice in their direction, the only time he did so during the production.<sup>197</sup> The historical Butler, Chambers’ Butler, is a young man, contemporary with the hero. Barrymore is not. In fact a year younger than Griffith, and looking past his youth, Barrymore is yet the most powerful man in the picture. Was this also an example of Griffith’s projection?

Griffith was happy to use the veneer of historical accuracy as an added endorsement of his work, but he rarely went far beyond the demands of getting the buttons right on a

uniform coat. His understanding of how history worked seems to have been on the most basic level. However, understanding of that sort has seldom been a disadvantage in popular culture. As novels, Robert Chambers' works satisfy the barest requirements, yet 25 of them were adopted as moving pictures in 18 years. Griffith was not merely at the top of his industry for ten years; he virtually created and sustained it when it might have remained a novelty entertainment. He knew what the people wanted before they knew it themselves. They did not want a history lesson; they wanted thrilling melodrama with a respectable veneer. The respectable veneer of *America* was the historical tableaux and the wholly respectable lovers. The thrilling melodrama was Walter Butler. Griffith had not permitted himself so magnetic an anti-hero before. Before this, his villains were squalid and sordid, but Chambers' plot required one with charm and physical courage. Then he cast Lionel Barrymore and there was no turning back.

Yet a few months later, Griffith was able to make a picture that showed ordinary people caught up in the turmoil of history. *Isn't Life Beautiful* is an intimate story about recognizable people acting naturally during a time of crisis. Had Griffith brought that sensibility to his picture about the American Revolution, he might have made a different, better movie—one about human beings.

In fact, the plot elements of *The Birth of Nation* also could be found in the basic threads of the matter of Cherry Valley, and by extension, the New York Revolutionary frontier: an agrarian community threatened by outside forces, driven to civil war and nearly destroyed, and then reborn. He knew the story of Civil War and Reconstruction, however; he was raised to believe it in his home and community. He knew little or nothing of the Mohawk Valley other than what Robert Chambers wrote. Without that personal insight, he could not tell that intimate story. Instead, he made an epic; like most epics, it was mainly

about money.

Griffith was the author of *America*. He controlled every image, every frame of film that appeared on the movie screen. Its relative failure cannot be blamed on Chambers or Will Hays, or the D.A.R. Griffith was still the master filmmaker; his recent work before and after *America*, and even some scenes and sequences from *America* demonstrate his skill. A number of poor decisions, all his, beginning with his choice of *The Reckoning* as the basis for the screenplay, doomed the picture.

Often the phrase *runaway train* is used to describe pictures going wrong. The filmmakers reach a point of no return, at which they cannot alter the basic elements of the picture. A novelist can strike out a paragraph or a chapter; he can even put the whole manuscript in a bottom drawer and let it die quietly, but a picture costing millions cannot be so easily altered or put aside. As well, one of the poignant aspects of the story of *America* is the fact that everyone involved thought they were making a hit.

We are now in an area of popular culture where commerce rules the marketplace. Writers and painters still create their works alone, without interference, offer them to publishers and *then* confront the marketplace. The marketplace confronts the filmmaker before pen or paintbrush touches paper. No idea will survive an hour if it is not commercially viable. There will be two more examples of this type of commercial entertainment to consider, but the given premise for these has already been demonstrated by Griffith's *America*. The artist and his impulse are no longer in control; the marketplace drives and rules.

*If America had been a success, Walter Butler now might be one of those historical figures that people who go to movies think they know about; figures like Cleopatra, T.E. Lawrence or Wyatt Earp, who are portrayed every decade or so in a book or movie claiming to tell the true story. For a short time he was,*

*but never transcended the melodramatic villainy that Chambers created for him. The shallowness of Chambers' plots shows how slight the concept was. The themes with real depth, the destruction of the Iroquois and the endurance of the settlers, were relegated to painted scenic drops behind the anti-heroism of Butler.*

*Cherry Valley was still the place he came to and from. It was a trigger, a code word that brought associations to mind without delving very deeply into their implications. Moviegoers might be surprised to learn that it was a living place, still fighting battles, still remembering. Not willing to surrender its story to the likes of Griffith and Chambers, they insisted on their ownership of their story. Their efforts and their version provide a control that could be compared to the brassy works of the showmen.*

## Chapter Nine: *The Country of Olden Days, 1927*

*Either unaware of the clamorous epics being screened in the wider world, or studiously ignoring them, the citizens of Cherry Valley prepared their own spectacle to honor their past and present. There were fifty more years of history to remember and a prospect of progress into the future to celebrate. The motor age had brought their byway back into at least regional prominence, and encouraged the thought of being a gateway to the west.*

*However, that had happened a hundred years before. Along with the promise of great things was an acknowledgement that everyone who wanted to go west had done so; that Cherry Valley was populated by the descendants of people who had chosen to stay put.*

*The pageant would celebrate all things—past, present and progress—but it would also celebrate the reality of a small town whose historical victory had been to maintain the bond with the land and its past.*

In 1927, the citizens of Cherry Valley commemorated a sesqui-centennial with two days of celebration. The official title was *Sesqui-Centennial Celebration of the Events of the American Revolution*, which, on the New York frontier apparently was deemed to have begun in the year 1777. It seems possible that the celebration of the 1776 sesqui-centennial was not ready in time, and no one wanted to wait until the year following for the commemoration of an event too ghastly to mark with rodeos, baseball games and a dance.

The casting director of the Pageant Committee, Miss Hilda E. Streeter, had compiled a guidebook the year previous, perhaps on schedule. In it she writes

Cherry Valley offers to you:  
Her hospitality as you journey east or west on business or on pleasure bent.  
Her many spots of historic interest.  
Her library, stored with records of the past.  
Her quiet, wooded hills, the upward lift of distant views, clear mountain air, and all the peace of unspoiled natural beauty.<sup>198</sup>

This, however brief, seems to accurately summarize the town in 1926. *Her hospitality as you*

*journey east or west . . .* refers to the Cherry Valley Turnpike, completed in 1924, a highway from Albany to Syracuse, also known as U.S. Route 20. It was paved on the old pike that first ran from Albany to Cherry Valley, where it met the old Iroquois road from the Mohawk, and then farther west. With this paved motor road the communities south of the Mohawk River Valley hoped to regain some of the traffic and prosperity they had lost a century before, when the Erie Canal became the primary route to the west.

*Her many spots of historic interest.* There were few communities so far from the coast with so long a history of continuous settlement; settlement which, almost from the birth of the town, was marked by a respect for learning and piety. From this grew a hard-earned patriotic spirit that went far beyond the borders of New York—the Masonic Lodge, instituted in 1806, had contributed to the Greeks in their own war of independence in 1824.<sup>199</sup>

*Her library, stored with records of the past.* The past again; an odd thing to cite in a preface to a tourist guide book, unless you mean to attract a certain class of tourist, one also moved by the prospect of *Her quiet, wooded hills, the upward lift of distant views, clear mountain air, and all the peace of unspoiled natural beauty.*

The business directory reveals the trade of a town that is a place to stop on the road to elsewhere: the 2 hotels, the 7 inns— some obviously boarding houses, the four antique and gift shops, the four garages, serving Chevrolet, Ford, Nash, Hudson and Willys-Overland owners, and Bert Crane's vulcanizing and tire repair.

The rest of the businesses service the community. Three doctors, a cluster of stores—dry goods, groceries, hardware, boots and shoes and a jeweler—in Monument Square; the Monument being the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in honor of the men who served in the Civil War, nearly a tenth of the town's entire population. One bank, three

barbers, a blacksmith, a hay buyer and two lawyers, all off the main square, as well as a beekeeper/florist, and a tailor who also dealt in police dogs and beagles.

To the founders' Presbyterian Church (the fifth built in town since 1742) had been added Grace Episcopal, the Methodist Episcopal and the newest congregation, St. Thomas Roman Catholic; the latter three plain wooden structures dwarfed by the stone Presbyterian Church with its four story tower capped by a spire itself nearly as tall as the tower. In case anyone was wondering how the pecking order lay.

The market town of a farm community, a stop on the turnpike, Cherry Valley may seem close to the narrow lanes of Sauk Center of *Main Street*, but it is even closer to the town that it was for all its life—close enough to Albany for the ambitious, yet far away enough for the contented, an open road east or west to bring something new every day, or offer the chance of change. It was founded as a refuge for the pious, and seems to have remained a haven for the undriven.

It was not a Zenith. The calm, reserved commercial announcements in the *Guidebook*, the *Souvenir Program* for the sesqui-centennial a year later, and 1927's *The Cherry Valley Turnpike* would make a Babbitt weep. *Her quiet, wooded hills, the upward lift of distant views, clear mountain air, and all the peace of unspoiled natural beauty* seems to be the most powerful allure imaginable.

The commercial debasement of those distant views and unspoiled natural beauty was met by uncharacteristic violence. Persons unknown had removed advertising signs and private billboards, made a pyre of them and burned it on September 16, 1927, coincident with the first meeting of the Cherry Valley Turnpike Association at Richfield Springs, approximate midpoint of the pike and eight miles west of Cherry Valley. Crude, hand lettered planks advertising *ICE·COLD·POP, RED HOTS, COFFEE* burned alongside



professionally lettered offerings such as *200 feet ahead for PERSPIRING PUPS* and *red hot DOGS*, and at least one manufacturer's placard for Quaker State Motor Oil. The story was picked up by the New York *Herald Tribune*, who dubbed the rustic vigilantes the Minute Men of the Cherry Valley Turnpike, and reprinted whole by *The Literary Digest*, and quoted proudly

in the Association's own guidebook.<sup>200</sup>

The Guidebook maintains a similar tone—no garish thrills are offered, only wholesome recreation. Each town has its own subtitle:

Duaneburg	<i>Old Christ Church Parish</i>	West Winfield	<i>On the Unadilla River</i>
Esperance	<i>The Old Covered Bridge</i>	Bridgewater	<i>In a Land of Milk and Honey</i>
Sharon Springs	<i>Famous Sulphur Bath</i>	Waterville	<i>The Garden Spot of New York</i>
Cherry Valley	<i>Of Revolutionary Fame</i>	Sangerfield	<i>A Little New England Village</i>
East Springfield	<i>A Turnpike Toll Station</i>	Madison	<i>In the Moraine Country</i>
Cooperstown	<i>Where Nature Smiles</i>	Hamilton	<i>Site of Colgate University</i>
Warren	<i>Between the Little Lakes</i>	Brouckville	<i>Famous for its Cider</i>
Richfield Springs	<i>The Great White Sulphur Spring</i>	Morrisville	<i>The Hub of Madison County</i>
East Winfield	<i>An Old Trading Post</i>	Cazenovia	<i>The Home of Hiawatha</i>

Were she not happy in her own hometown, Miss Streeter might be happy in any of these, or happy to meet anyone drawn to *An Old Trading Post*. The illustrations are similarly tasteful views of old houses, schools and churches, and lake and forest vistas, unmarred by throngs of tourists.<sup>201</sup>

Indeed, only one picture shows any more than a few people: a *Scene from the Sesqui-centennial Pageant at Cherry Valley*. Set near the old barracks on Lancaster Street, a crowd in colonial dress, surrounding an American flag, salutes it in the old-fashioned way: right hand





outstretched, palm up and open, until Fascism's usurpation made necessary a new manner of salute.<sup>202</sup>

The pageant was performed on each day of the celebration, Wednesday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, at 2 in the afternoon (after the Parade and the Rodeo, and before the Baseball Game and the Dance) and Thursday, July 21<sup>st</sup> at 2.30, after the Sports ( 100 yard dash, Boy Scouts Tug of War, Girl Scouts 50 yard dash; Wheelbarrow, Relay, Potato, Candle, Sack, Egg, and Joan and Darby races; Shot Put and Pie Eating contests) and the Rodeo, and the Sesqui-centennial Marker unveiling, and before the Wrestling and Boxing in the evening.<sup>203</sup>

The pageant and its songs were written by Captain Abraham B. Cox, owner and proprietor of Glensfoot Dairy Farm, originally owned by the Reverend Samuel Dunlop, the beloved dominie and founder of the Presbyterian Church.

*His home at the time of the massacre stood where the present DUNLOP MARKER is located. His wife was shot and her arm cut from her body and thrown into an apple tree, which was standing until comparatively recent time.*<sup>204</sup>

It began with the entry of History, played by a woman, mounting a platform on one side of the performing space, and then the entry of The Pioneer, a man, mounting the platform opposite History, who began:

My name is History, I write  
How works of glory or of shame

Were wrought, my scroll in fearless light  
Unerringly does truth proclaim.

Answered by The Pioneer:

And I, The PIONEER, my deeds  
Through all that endless scroll are strown  
I followed where the sunlight leads,  
I found and won a world unknown!

They continued to narrate and comment upon the action from their places. First the Iroquois, original owners of the place, meet peacefully in the clearing, exchanging pleasantries in mime and concluding with a dance. Then the Pioneers, among the famous names of Cherry Valley's early, heroic history, accompanied by the friendly Iroquois Skenando, enter the space; await the arrival of the wagon train with more families and the Reverend Dunlop, who leads all in silent prayer, while the Chorus sings the Doxology.

Next is the naming of the place. The Dominie Dunlop and Mr. Lindsey meet and agree that Lindsey's Bush is too prosaic a name for their home. They are trying to come up with something new when women and children enter the scene with libations.

DUNLOP—What is this, Mistress Rachel?  
MISTRESS RACHEL—Why Dominie, 'tis the new beverage we have made  
from the wild cherry crop. My husband says it puts new vigor in him, and  
we call it in our family "Cherry Bounce."

Then all drink, and sing, and await Sir William Johnson. He arrives shortly, in time to taste the Cherry Bounce and agree that the settlement's new name of Cherry Valley is apt indeed. Note that we are now in the eighth year of Prohibition, watching a historical pageant, and seeing that alcohol, far from the demon, invites good cheer, amity and song. It is possible to respect the law of the land, and respect a time when it was not. The events follow in order. A rude school is founded:

ENTER DOMINIE DUNLAP, driving plow, and followed by schoolboys  
having books, most of which they hold open and appear to read. DUNLAP

stops . . . and explains something to one boy, drives along further, stops, and explains to another boy. Shakes switch at him. Drives off, followed by boys. All in pantomime.

Their country calls the young men away, leaving a sparse militia to defend the village until the arrival of the regulars, commanded by Colonel Alden. Alden scoffs at the threat posed by Indians and Tories, having faced British Regulars. Mr. Robert Wells conducts him to the fort and to lodgings in the Wells house. Neither here or afterward is mentioned the very well known fact of the Wells family's Loyalist sympathies.

( . . . *DUNLOP is the last to leave the STAGE, shaking head.*)

*HISTORY*—Through trackless woods, in early dawn,  
Like panthers searching for their prey,  
Fierce Butler's devils, creeping on,  
Relentless made their stealthy way. . . .

*PIONEER*—While friend slays friend, while man shall boast  
A brother's death, revenge to gain,  
Butler with all his Tory host  
Shall chiefly bear the brand of Cain!

(*ENTER CAPTAIN WALTER BUTLER, with RANGERS, TORIES and INDIANS*)

*BUTLER*—God—or the Devil—is with us this morning. Alden has not a single scout who has not been captured! Revenge is ours! Who dwells in that house?

*TORY*—Friends of mine, Captain, an old preacher, and his family. I asked your permission to warn them last night, but you refused me!

*BUTLER*—We can't discriminate at such a time as this! They'll have to take their chances! Listen to me! You were all at Oriskany! You know the bitterness of defeat! (*Turning to Indians.*) Warriors, you remember how your brothers fell! The men of Tryon County and of Cherry Valley were the victors! Now you can be avenged on your enemies! Scalp! Burn! Slay! Revenge is sweet!

Random historical mayhem ensues. Alden is pursued across the stage by an Indian, who reappears with a scalp. Mrs. Clyde hides her children and herself. Mrs. Dunlop is shot, and Little Aaron appears to rescue Mr. Dunlop. Joseph Brant appears; when his Mohawks start to attack women and children

*Brant stops them with a lordly gesture.*

*BRANT*—I fight with warriors, I do not war on women! (*To WOMAN.*) Why are you here? Were you not warned? Why did you not flee?

*WOMAN*—We are loyal to the King. We saw no reason to flee . . . There is one

Joseph Brant. If he is with the Indians, he will save us.  
BRANT—I am Joseph Brant, but I am not in command.

He marks them and hides them, barring the way to less discriminating Seneca.

BRANT—What? Dare defy a Mohawk chief?

Butler returns.

BUTLER—We have our revenge for Oriskany! (*Holds up scalp. Sees BRANT. They look at each other, but say nothing.*)

MRS. CAMPBELL—(*Captive*). Walter Butler, you have what you please to call your revenge. Enjoy it, if you can. For I say to you—you will remember too late this massacre in Cherry Valley!

(*EXUENT OMNES, last of all, BRANT and MOHAWK INDIANS.*)

The villagers return to the ruin of their homes, finding a lost child, but the mood is still desolate. It is soon to be relieved by the next scene, playing the death of Walter Butler.

(*ENTER BUTLER, who turns and makes a mocking gesture. Sound of shot. BUTLER falls wounded.*)

(*ENTER ONEIDA INDIAN, he seizes Butler and brandishes tomahawk. BUTLER supplicates him. ONEIDA INDIAN tomahawks BUTLER.*)  
ONEIDA—Remember Cherry Valley! (*Stands over Butler in triumph. ENTER SOLDIERS, who stand, and then carry BUTLER off. EXIT.*)

The last two scenes celebrate the visit of George Washington in 1783 and the opening of the Turnpike in 1799. The villagers, and a few Indians, raise a flagpole and the new flag. They sing a patriotic song, of Captain Cox's creation, and witness the tableau-like entry of Generals Washington, Clinton and Hand, all mounted.

The final scene of 1799 is less solemn but oddly muted. It begins with a song.

Why, O ye wanderers, leave behind  
Kinsfolk and neighbors and landscape most  
dear?  
Where do you ye hope thus better to  
find,  
Why are ye thus all abandoning here?

Ye to whom luring yet farther away  
Beckons the road, as to spirits all free,  
Out of the Country of Olden Days  
Into the Realm of the Days-to-be!

In front of a tavern, rustics pitch quoits, sip ale and their pipes, and talk of the travelers. The landlord awaits his honored guests, Colonel Campbell and the Reverend Nott. Campbell

marvels at the prosperous new inn, and compares the thriving village to the ruin he knew twenty years ago. Reverend Nott agrees, and wonders at the travelers

. . . there are still some venturesome souls, who believe that the loss of their scalps on the western plains will add to the glory of the nation, rather than to live peacefully at home.

A family in a covered wagon stops at the inn to deliver goods.

NOTT—Are you stopping with us?

DRIVER—Not a bit of it. I am a poor man, and if I stop must pay for my land. I am off to the Ohio, where the plains are free and open to the man who gets there first . . . I want to go where everything is new, and start from the beginning. (EXIT with WAGON.)

CAMPBELL—That's just what people used to say when I was young!

WALTON—Some of them have more sense, though. Otsego County is good enough for anybody. We don't want those restless people, who are forever going on!

The scene is soon enlivened by a coach filled with the right sort of people, the gay young gentry of Cooperstown, eighteen miles west—not too far. They sing a coaching song, to the apparent tune of *Over the Hills and Far Away*, and dismount. A fiddler and all join in a country dance until the landlord invites them in for dinner. History and Pioneer reappear to speak the epilogue, and a caravan of vehicles passes, from covered wagon to modern car.

Despite the potentially overbearing presence of Captain Cox, Chairman of the Pageant Committee, owner of Glensfoot Farm and author of the play, we can surmise that it was a group effort; that the committee, largest of the sesqui-centennial, was able to review and consult and otherwise approve the final script. That may have been why it was possibly a year late. There is nothing in it to offend any sensibility, with the possible exceptions of the Cherry Bounce and Butler's scalp, and his scalping. Brant is clearly differentiated as a humane and gallant warrior. The action is very close to the account by William Campbell in his *Annals of Tryon County*, the village's chronicle of its heroic past.

And past it is, since 1799 ends the action. *We don't want those restless people, who are*

*forever going on!* The farthest horizon is Cooperstown; from a hill you might see its haze in the day or its lights in the evening. No apparent contradiction is seen in the story of a town founded by pioneers on the edge of settlement, now inhabited by their posterity, more than content to remain in the *Country of Olden Days* and watch the future pass them by. There is achievement—people come from Cherry Valley to do notable things in the region; their sons go out in all their country's wars, and most of them return home, but never do they celebrate the boy who went out to Oregon and founded a town or a company. He may not exist, or is not spoken of, or is simply forgotten.

The pageant ended the events of the second day, except for bouts of boxing and wrestling later that evening. Most people would have driven home on the Pike east and west out of town. Those living in town could walk home; it was still less than a mile from end to end. The Pike east of the town center was called Main Street; on it lay the Village Hall, the library and the new Tryon Tavern—not the old coaching house that burned down in 1866 but a modern motor lodge with 20 acres of grounds. The Pike west out of town passed the site of the old Tryon House and the new high school, and farther west, at a bend in the road, Captain Cox's Glensfoot Farm. The marker there, barely legible from the road, told the story of the Dunlop family.

It was south of town, on Alden Street, a local road, that the history of the town was encapsulated. The Presbyterian Church stood tall and alone, overlooking the cemetery grounds where the old Fort stood, where the dead of the Massacre were buried and where the Monument was raised to their memory. From it could be seen the marker where Colonel Alden fell, and beyond it the farmstead where the Wells house had stood. In sight of both, facing the Cemetery Gates was The Motor Shop, where Arthur See would sell or service a Nash.

*Beneath the exuberant amateurism of the pageant—and its making was probably a better show than anything they staged—is a homely honesty. A small town acknowledges that it will always be so, that sufficiency is enough, and the road is there for those who think otherwise. The wish of Jane Campbell for her children, that their country will not have need of them, remains a value for their descendants. If you do not understand what it means to have history happen to you, you are better off experiencing it in a library or a pageant.*

*The matter now seems to be at rest in Cherry Valley. Now what remains in the culture comes from outside, from strangers for whom the matter is alien, who must work their imaginations to know what others know in their bones.*

## Chapter Ten: Howard W. Swiggett: *War Out of Niagara*, 1933

*All history is reconciliation of a set of conflicting accounts; when a new account is found, or there is a new way to look at it, it is called revision. Revisionism is the name given to the distress felt by people in love with the older story, regardless of its truth. People who think of revisionism as an symptom of modernism and a liberal academy might be surprised at the revisionism of the post (Great) war era, which might trend right as easily as to the left.*

*Faced with a changing nation, not necessarily for the better, some writers looked back to see if there was a point that should not have been turned, or a mistake that could be yet rectified. The academy was not yet solidly entrenched; there were not yet two cultures in the writing of history, one high, one popular.*

*Historians still thought it useful to speak and to listen to the masses as well as each other. The gate was still open, the fences not yet complete.*

Although he did not have the appearance of a subversive, Harold Murdock—a Boston banker in the early middle age assumed by men in that field at the age of twenty-five years—was the author of a subversive book. *The Nineteenth of April, 1775* retold the story of the confrontation between the militia and the King's regulars on Lexington Green. In basing his account on contemporary reports and eyewitnesses, Murdock only did what any conscientious historian would do. But he went past that point. The bulk of his book was the story of how much the tale had been twisted in the one hundred and fifty years—yes, another sesqui-centennial—since the event.

The Lexington militia company had gathered to oppose the march of the regulars to Concord to seize guns and ammunition from the militia. Confronted by the advance guard of the regulars and ordered to disperse, they did so. While dispersing, a shot was fired that began a general fire between the retreating militiamen and the regulars. The short exchange was ended by vigorous orders to cease fire by the regular officers and the flight of the



militiamen. The column then continued out of the town onto the Concord Road.

All the early accounts confirmed this version, but over the years the militia was portrayed increasingly as presenting a much stiffer resistance than eyewitnesses saw. The first print of the fight, engraved by Paul Revere, showed ordered lines of regulars firing at the backs of militiamen in disarray and retreat, with a few men firing back. By the centennial of the event, ordered lines of regulars were firing at ordered lines of militiamen. By Harold Murdock's time, this was the accepted version of the story taught in the high schools, then the guardians and transmitters of national tradition. So it appears in Griffith's *America*.

Murdock detailed, print by print and painting, the visual evolution of the truth into legend. He showed how local pride impelled the Lexington people into exaggerating the resistance of their grandfathers, and how national pride encouraged acceptance of this suicidal exchange—seventy militiamen trading fire with more than 200 regulars.

He ended with a brief admonition about believing everything that you are told, and a suggestion for a better legend. Instead of those bloody old prints of a battle that never took place, paint the image of the dawn muster of Captain Parker's company on Lexington Green; men gathering to face and oppose Royal oppression. When the National Park Service issued its historical monograph in the Bicentennial years, the two illustrations of Lexington showed that very image: men mustering, and then standing in line facing the sunrise and the approaching regulars.

Now while iconoclasm was a cultural feature of the 1920's, a postwar reaction to the old lies of the war years, Murdock was not interesting in smashing legends, but creating a better, truer one. He is careful to point out that the British soldiers, faced by increasing and frustrating resistance, behaved for the most part with courage and humanity, and his respect for the British commander Hugh Percy, Earl of Northumberland, is plain; Percy's portrait is

the frontispiece. This is conservative revisionism. Disperse the lies and discover the common humanity of the Americans and their British enemy, who may be seen to have more in common with culturally dominant Anglo-Saxon Americans of the day than the immigrant masses teeming on the other side of the tracks—blood is still thicker than water.<sup>205</sup>

A few years later in 1930 Kenneth Roberts wrote the first of a best selling series of historical novels about revolutionary America, *Arundel*, about the failed attempt to invade Canada by overland march across Maine. As a novelist, Roberts is a throwback to the type of Harold Frederic, and through him, Thackeray. He is conscious of the tension between the classes; his heroes cross those lines through merit, and often less through social necessity and more for love—sometimes of the wrong woman. In this respect he is closer to Thackeray; frustrating his readers by his hero's insistence on fixing his emotions on the wrong woman, while the right one is in plain sight. His heroes are also rooted in the mainstream of their society. However they may raise themselves by merit—never very far—they try to keep the respect of the mass from which they sprang, not out of prudence but self-respect.

Roberts had an experience that most writers of his time lacked. In 1917, like most young men, he joined the Army. The Army sent him not to France but Siberia, as a part of the expeditionary force intervening in the Russian Revolution. He got to see what history looked like with the hide still on it, and what happens when an ancient regime collapses. For him anarchy was not an abstract; he watched as various bands of brutal thugs asserted authority solely through force. It was not surprising that Roberts found a refuge in the heroic American past, and saw it through a conservative glass.

His best-selling novels *Arundel* and *Rabble in Arms* were grounded in the failed

invasion of Canada and the subsequent defense against invasion from Canada. They were far more grounded in history and reality than the works of Robert Chambers; Chambers may have known the countryside but so did Roberts, and he did not need a book to know what an army was like. He did use original sources; wise historical novelists do so to find the stuff that no imagination could create or credit. Using the best sources available at the time, he fleshed out his characters with realism, and found real characters to co-exist with them.

One of them was the actual hero of the Quebec and Saratoga campaigns, according to the historians then and now. It is a measure of Roberts' devotion to history, and perhaps an old soldier's desire to shock the home folks, that he should present the reading public of 1930 and 1933 with novels which included celebrations of the patriotism and heroic leadership of General Benedict Arnold.

Roberts' Arnold is not one of Tolstoy's Great Men; he provides leadership and intelligent direction to a people's army, the real heroes of Roberts' novels. Arnold, in spite of or because of his success in battle, is bedeviled by scoundrels and intriguers far from the battlefield; it is they and his Old English qualms about a French alliance—a kind of conservatism—that cause him to change sides. At the time of the novels, even up to the time of the writing of the last novel in which Arnold makes an appearance, *Oliver Wiswell*, this was a valid historical argument. It was that very year of 1940 that British secret service papers were published, disclosing Arnold's sordid bargaining for money and place as the price of his treason. The question changed; from how such a hero could have gone wrong, to how could such a man ever be mistaken for a hero?

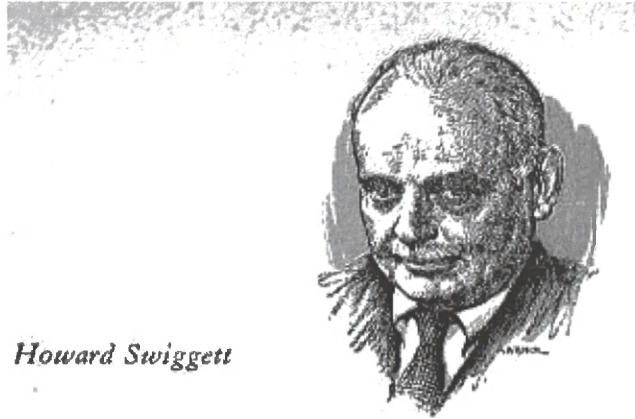
Roberts' other characters are innately conservative, not so much revolutionaries as reactionaries against Royal usurpation of the traditional rights of Englishmen. They are all good English stock as well, with no such name as Douw Mauverensen among the list of

heroes, though you may find one among the rustics or comic relief. As he wrote, he continued to explore contrary, even reactionary themes. The actual hero of his biggest best-seller, *Northwest Passage*, is Robert Rogers, an American Ranger of the French and Indian War who sides with the King in the Revolution. The titular hero of *Oliver Wiswell* is an American Loyalist, whose years in the King's service take him to the numerous Loyalist enclaves in nominally Revolutionary America.

Roberts is contrary but not perverse. His Loyalists deny the Revolution, but for good American reasons. They are more conservative than the Revolutionaries, but in 1940—and now—so are most Americans. Like the actual Loyalists, and many conservatives, they distrust change and the men who demand it for its own sake. Roberts quotes John Adams' old formula for the political makeup of pre-Revolutionary America—even thirds for Independence, Loyalty and neutrality—which may not be strictly correct; he notes correctly that in 1779 more Americans were members of Loyalist corps than serving in Washington's army.

Roberts continued writing historical novels well into the 50's, and remained in print after his death, and like Chambers, outsold Faulkner in his time. Today his novels still may be found on the shelves of summer homes and resale shops, where they may be found for decades more, safe from the attention of literary explicators.

While Murdock and Roberts hardly constitute a movement, they indicate that it was possible for an author, preferably with sound conservative credentials, to write fact or fiction contrary to what had been regarded as American orthodoxy.



*Howard Swiggett*

In my childhood, which begins intellectually with the Spanish War, I delighted in the American historical novels of the Revolution and Civil War of which there were so many . . . Shortly after the beginning of the century I read *The Maid at Arms*, by Robert W. Chambers, and there encountered the villainous Walter Butler. . . . For almost thirty years I have been fascinated by the mystery of this young man to whom every horrible crime has been ascribed, whose birthday and burial place are both unknown. Why was he, the youngest of the lot, picked out beyond all the Loyalist leaders for the unpardonable sins of the Revolution?—Howard Swiggett<sup>206</sup>

Howard Swiggett was born in Ripley, Ohio, a village in tobacco country, whose Main Street ended on the Ohio River. He went from Ripley to Yale and graduated in 1914. Before entering the textile business he had served for several years as a secretary to the Police Commissioner of New York, Col. Arthur Wood.<sup>207</sup> Wartime service had left him unscathed; he had to come home to be wounded. On September 16, 1920, at 12.01 pm, unknown persons detonated a bomb in Wall Street that killed thirty-eight people and injured some 400 others. One of them was Howard Swiggett.

After a long convalescence, he returned to business.<sup>208</sup> It was during his business career that he spent his Saturday afternoons—the only non-business hours available—in the libraries of New York City, researching the life and times of Walter Butler. One January afternoon he looked around his table and saw opposite himself Dr. Frederick Pottle correcting proofs of the Malahide *Papers of James Boswell*, with an actual *Journal* in hand. At the

end of the table Dr. A.C. Flick was at work on his study of New York Loyalists. Swiggett was proud of the company of such scholars; he also relished the Dickensian meeting of Pottle, Flick & Swiggett.<sup>209</sup>

He worked slowly with the little time he could make free. He felt that shiver that comes when an obscure work is unavailable, already in use—perhaps by a researcher on the same trail. Where the register he signed called for a subject, he found himself writing a false one, and requesting that the librarians keep his research subjects confidential. All through the three years of his study he expected to be pipped at the post by some young, fulltime academic with limitless time and resources.<sup>210</sup>

His method was simple. He examined documents directly from the collections of the New York Public Library, and indirectly through interlibrary loan or research from libraries in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. These documents were arranged chronologically and then connected by Swiggett in his narrative. It is a sound way to write history, as long as each document is given its actual importance within the narrative, and as long as the author works from his sources to his conclusion, and not the other way around.

Among Swiggett's primary sources were the nine surviving letters, reports and journals written by Butler himself, found in various archives and assembled by him for the first time. Previously quoted in part, Swiggett quotes them in their entirety and establishes their context and importance. Some of this was done by Ernest Cruickshank nearly fifty years before, as a part of his fourteen page biographical essay on Butler, but Swiggett's account was nearly 276 pages longer. Much of this was the added account of the frontier situation before and during the Revolution. At least twenty pages of it was a bibliographical essay, describing the historical sources and the fictional accounts of Butler, including those by Harold Frederic and Robert W. Chambers.

Much of what he uncovered in the course of his research is not strictly relevant to Walter Butler's story, but it is such good stuff that he could not bear to omit it, and you can see why. In describing St. Leger's invasion of the Mohawk Valley in 1777, Swiggett includes some of the testimony of a witness before the Council of Safety

. . . that he came to James Jones' house and a man with a blind left eye was sitting in the house; that he had a speckled under Jackout, Brown Surtout coat, Blue Wooling stockings and strings in his shoes; that he asked Jones where that fellow came from; that Jones told him he did not know him; that then he, Jones, and the one eyed man set out together in company; as they were going along he asked the one-eyed man what his name was, but the man would not tell him, but told him he came from the Mohake River thro Albany; that the one-eyed man was about five feet ten inches high; that said man told him he heard the Regulars were across the Lake, and that the Indians were to come down; that one Butler was the head of them; . . . that they stayed that night in the woods and in the morning set out until they came to a house where Rose called the men in to take down their names, that they all gave their names but him and James Jones; that then he, Jones and the one-eyed man went out and sat under an apple tree.<sup>211</sup>

Anyone can write about the uncertainty and fog of rumor in wartime, but few accounts convey it as well as the seemingly artless testimony of an unknown man trying to tell as much of the truth as he can without talking himself down a lead mine in Connecticut. He may be talking about a spy, who may have one eye, or who may be James Jones, or who may be himself, but the one-eyed man is a stranger and his freedom is the easiest to discard, under an apple tree.

(. . . *one Butler*. . . is not Walter, who was then under arrest in an Albany jail, but his father John, an agent in the Indian Department—a far important man than Walter Butler, more successful as an Indian diplomatist, a soldier, a politician and a dynast. Had he been in a novel, his biography might have been written.)

The passage is interesting but says nothing of Walter Butler. However it serves to illuminate the *times* of Walter Butler, and his world. His revolutionary war was not the clear

cut struggle that it was on the seaboard. Historians afterwards would attempt to assign economic or political motives to the ideological positions of the Revolutionary generation, but these positions were often chosen despite ruinous cost to their owners. Choices were even less clear on the frontier, where the combatants were neighbors rather than soldiers.

For nearly two years after Lexington the frontier struggle was primarily political, as the two factions negotiated with each other, and with the Iroquois, each trying to establish a position of such overwhelming force as to preclude violence. When this did not happen, when the hitherto inviolate Iroquois confederation was divided, the war came, unleashing the ferocious violence of Oriskany, and its four year aftermath. The uncertainty, the tension and the violence are the matter of Swiggett's first chapters, and he conveys these with the skill of the best-selling novelist he later became.

His subject, however, is Walter Butler, and with so little documentary detail available about the man it is necessary to print every extent letter he wrote, including this one in January of 1775:

I have just been applied to by a man to know what Messrs. Cruger and Holland would take for a certain lot of land in the Suchundage Patent, whereon Peter Witmore sometime ago lived—he says he will give 20 shillings for every acre and more if they will accept at that he will pay the cash on executing the deeds.

My father is very uneasy at not hearing from you and Mr. Duane about the award between him and Wullard Hanson, he fears you have let it slip—be so kind and write on this and the several other matters I sometime ago wrote you on.

In the suit of Garrison and Cupernal Garrison tells me Cupernal is dead.

I am with respects to Mrs. Van Schaack,  
Your well wisher  
Walter Butler<sup>212</sup>

This and similar letters establish Butler's literacy and attention to business. Based on the letters he wrote, there is nothing to dispute the characterization of Cruikshank's article of



1893, showing Butler as a industrious young man of good character and zealous loyalty to the King, and a subaltern who did his duty as well as he could— but little more. There are flashes of anger at accusations of bad conduct, and some ardent requests for leave, compensation or promotion, but little else of the man appears in his letters. Respects to his parents are as conventional as the close of his letter to Peter Van Schaack. There are no letters to or from friends, and not even the hint of any romantic attachments or complications. There is emotion, but it is the kind most suited to an antihero. As one authority noted:

In practically every one of Walter Butler's letters he has some personal grievance to air, some personal motive to urge. Except for the stereotyped "His Majesty's Service" there is never a word of loftier intent, nothing of either provincial or national consciousness, nothing of any moral aspiration, no hint of vision—compare his letters with letters from our line officers and from the general officers in our forces, such men as Schuyler, Heath, Greene, Knox, Scammell, Willett, Gansevoort. Always it is himself and his family who dominate his thoughts, his own grievances, his personal and restless ambitions. There is scarcely a kind word for anybody else, never any generous praise, only a selfish and gloomy preoccupation.<sup>213</sup>

It is a harsh judgment and unfriendly to Swiggett's thesis, and it is unlikely that he would quote it without refutation had it come (apparently in a personal letter) from anyone other than Robert W. Chambers. Swiggett acknowledges it instead as a defect in Butler's character.

Shortly after the beginning of the century I read *The Maid at Arms*, by Robert W. Chambers, and there encountered the villainous Walter Butler. . . . For almost thirty years I have been fascinated by the mystery of this young man . . .<sup>214</sup>

Swiggett seems to have begun his search for Walter Butler to see how much of the fictitious Butler who appears in the novels of Chambers and Frederic was true. This fictional character already departs from the early chronicles in suggesting another dimension for Butler, portraying him as an accomplished, pleasant young gentleman, with conservative, even

reactionary political views. The chronicles of Campbell, Stone, and Sims only show a cruel and relentless enemy, but the novelists are far enough away from the carnage to imagine what lies beneath, and to create a character with more than a single dimension. They may have derived him from the recently defeated reactionaries of the Confederacy, or gone back to Thackeray's cruel yet attractive bucks. Frederic began it, Chambers continued it and Swiggett, with a body of letters and reports written by a diligent young lawyer and soldier, seems to have wanted to see how much of it derived from fact rather than imagination.

Frederic created the image of the frontier squireen. His Butler is a minor character, part of the background detail; the real man figures so prominently in the annals that explaining his absence would have been harder work than recreating him. Frederic gave him a small part because he already had a Tory antagonist.

Chambers embroidered that character of Butler through five novels, drifting farther from the chronicles, making of him an ambitious young imperialist, more like the contemporary young men scrambling for Africa than a frontier lawyer turned soldier.

That was the keynote for Swiggett's Butler. He searched the records for evidence to prove his thesis. It was not enough to prove that Butler was innocent of direct involvement in the murders of the civilians at Cherry Valley; the annalists had already done that by omission, describing his bloody reputation but failing to lay a single death at his door. The larger sin, making war allied to savage Indians, was hardly exclusive to him, as Cruikshank noted; George Washington, among numerous colonial worthies, had done the same thing.<sup>215</sup> American agents would solicit the support of Indians in their future wars as avidly as the agents of the Crown had. Swiggett seems to have been perplexed by the black legend of Butler embedded in upstate New York myth. That it had little or no basis in objective reality, and that the myth was nearly dead did not matter.

Departing from the fictitious Butler, Swiggett had three options. He could explore the life and times of the actual man; using the primary source documents he had examined to illustrate the challenges of the New York Revolutionary frontier and Butler's response to them. In this he had a precedent and example. Harold Murdock had done exactly that in his monograph on the events on Lexington Green, removing the veneer of myth from a much deeper national memory.

He could have put aside his original biography and tried to tell the larger story of the Revolutionary frontier, this time through the point of view of the Loyalists, replacing the existing imperfect synthesis of the chronicles and the fiction with a thorough account based on the primary sources, in which he had already struck gold.

Finally, he could have written a novel. In some ways this was the most ambitious project, yet Kenneth Roberts had proved that the public was receptive to historical fiction about the Revolution, and successful fiction always sold better than successful non-fiction. Swiggett wanted to fill the gaps in Butler's story; to tell the story spread out over five novels by two authors into a single book. It had been fiction that had stirred his interest in history, and he may have felt the first stirrings of the creative urge which was to result in several best-selling novels.

Swiggett seems to have made the conscious decision to stick to his first ambition, that of writing the life of Walter Butler, but to use the background matter that led to the possibility of his second option to flesh out the story. There was simply not that much actual documentary material about Walter Butler—a few letters, no journals, memoirs or biographies aside from Cruikshank's brief article. By telling the story of the people of his milieu, his family, fellow soldiers, his contemporaries, he could get closer to Butler. At no point does he indicate any awareness that he had chosen the third option as well.

The drift is gradual from suppositions about his childhood and youthful attitudes to the far less supportable suppositions, drifting into presumed fact, about his adult life and motivations, and actions that were well documented. He describes the childhood of Walter Butler:

The childish play of Walter Butler and his bothers and sisters, and of all the children of the family, must have been that of the *Delectable Ballad of the Waller Lot* . . . The first dread hearsay of childhood must have been of scalping, of the prisoner at the stake, and running the gauntlet . . . the illegitimate horde of Sir William from old Fort Johnson must have lent reality to their play with their own redskins.<sup>216</sup>

The *must have beens* occur on nearly every page; the quoted passage has three in a single paragraph. Variations on the modal present perfect tense include *may well have then*, *must have seen* and *may have been*. The same effect is obtained by beginning a sentence or phrase with *possibly* or *it is not unlikely that*. Sometimes the effect is almost self-parody:

There must have been more good stories on New Year's Eve at the Butler house, and possibly presents from New York or Philadelphia, and Mrs. Butler perhaps reminding Lieutenant Butler that Walter would soon be ten, and she twenty-six, and there may have been talk of the houses the Johnsons were planning.<sup>217</sup>

There is one more sentence in that four-modal paragraph, with a single footnote about the date of a commission for a Justice of the Peace. All of that quoted above is a guess, as is this:

But it is possible, of course, that young Walter may have been thrilled by the dull young man of twenty, the heir of the great Sir William, living with a mistress in old Fort Johnson.<sup>218</sup>

*The dull young man of twenty* is John Johnson, who is a frequent presence in the book. He leads the Johnson family faction which Swiggett sees as opposed to the Butlers. According to Swiggett, Sir John Johnson, his cousins, and his in-laws, block the advancement of the harder-working, more brilliant Butlers. He also sees the Indian Department as being divided into two ideological factions. He reports that the Butlers, John and Walter, resisted involving

the Iroquois in offensive warfare against the Rebels, and chose to employ them instead as a defensive barrier against Rebel invasion of Niagara and the Iroquois homelands. The Johnsons are not so scrupulous and work to involve the Iroquois actively against the Rebel settlements on the Mohawk frontier.

His support for this is a quote from a dispatch from Daniel Claus, a member of the Johnson faction, complaining about John Butler's ineffectual relations with the Iroquois.

Claus's expenses

. . . did not amount to  $\frac{1}{4}$  the sum of what I hear Mr. Butler's expenses do within the two years and that expended merely to *keep the Indians inactive* contrary to their inclinations.<sup>219</sup>

. . . *to keep the Indians inactive* . . . is italicized in the text for emphasis. It may be that Claus is comparing his own fiscal integrity and effectiveness with the wasteful, ineffectual Butler.

Swiggett regards it as evidence . . . *that Butler spent great sums in maintaining at once their allegiance and their inactivity*<sup>220</sup> under orders from General Sir Guy Carleton, and out of his own humane inclination:

It is plain from the Claus letter of condemnation that both Butlers tried, against the wishes of the Johnsons, to keep the Indians from the conflict until St. Leger came down the river in '77.<sup>221</sup>

This is an assertion-to-fact transition. There is a fact that John Butler, under orders from Carleton, counseled restraint to the Iroquois against involvement at the *outbreak* of the rebellion. The Johnsons thought otherwise. Their homes, friends and families were being menaced *now*, and Quebec's reserving the Iroquois card to be played at a later date as part of a grand strategy gave their people no relief. That was the whole nature of this aspect of the Butler-Johnson dispute: Butler's servile obedience to Carleton, not Butler's humanitarian reservations in unleashing the Iroquois. When Carleton did give the order, no one jumped faster than John Butler.

At the same time, Swiggett questions the value of the Iroquois' allegiance and their ability:

He (John Butler) has seen their utter instability at Oriskany against what

Trevelyan would call "grown men".<sup>222</sup>

Except that Butler (whom Swiggett, and no other historian before or since, gives credit for leading the Loyalists and Iroquois in the ambush at Oriskany) was quite willing to raise his titular corps of rangers for service with those same Iroquois, and to lead a mixed force of rangers and Iroquois against the Wyoming Valley settlements in June, 1778. He also dispatched his son Walter on a similar raid against Cherry Valley a few months later.

John Butler's source of power within the Indian Department consisted of his ability to influence the Iroquois on behalf of the Crown, sometimes against their own interests. The fact that the Johnson family had the same ability makes them seem rivals for ascendancy in the Indian Department, but all answered to Sir Guy Carleton, and later to Sir Frederick Haldemand in Quebec, and quickly suffered the results of official displeasure when orders were not obeyed.

John Butler's own *Narrative of the Services of Lieut.-Colonel John Butler*, written in 1785, makes the same point. He describes his 30 years of service in the Indian Department, including the following high points:

I believe Sir G. C. (Guy Carleton) will do me the Justice to say, that his Expectations at that period went no farther than to keep them in a State of *Neutrality*. His instructions to me were directed to that object. I had several Conferences with the Chiefs & Warriors of the Six Nations, & used every means in my power to point out to them the insidious Designs of the Rebels & the pernicious consequences of their joining the King's Enemies. In this I was successful & the Rebel Emissaries were obliged to quit the Indian Country.

In the year 1777, when every Effort had failed either by Reconciliation or Force to put an End to the Rebellion, & when it was Evident that the Indians would no longer remain Neutral,  
... the Plan was first formed to employ them offensively; & I was ordered by

Gen[era]l. Carleton to collect the Six Nations & such Whites as I could, & to take the Command of them on the Expedition under Brig[adie]r. Gen[era]l. St. Leger against Fort Stanwix. I did accordingly convene the Indians of the Six Nations, & then for the first time gave them the War belt, which they accepted and engaged in the Expedition. I had the Honor to Command them under Sir J. Johnson at the defeat of Genl Herkimer at Oriskany with a Reinforcement for the relief of the Fort. . . .

In 1780 I was honored by General Haldimand with the appointment of Lieut. Colo.[nel] Commandant, & the Indians and Rangers under my Command were employed in harassing the Frontiers in order to favor the Progress of our Southern Army which was then expected up the Hudson's River.

In 1781 I commanded a party of Indians & Rangers on an Expedition under the Command of Sir John Johnson Bart. against Schoharie, Mohawk River, Stone Arabia, Canajoharie, &c., & in the year 1782 I was employed in sending out Parties against the Frontiers of the Rebel States, in order as much as possible to distress the Enemy.<sup>223</sup>

Despite his devotion to finding primary sources by and about the Butlers, this one eluded Swiggett, although it is not a manuscript but a quote from a book published in Ontario in 1928 and edited, inevitably, by Ernest Cruikshank. Swiggett seems to be unaware of the book, and he does not acknowledge any assistance—or note its lack—from Cruikshank, the living chronicler of Butler's Rangers and the only person who had written a biography, however brief, of Walter Butler.

It is John Butler's own testimony that he followed the orders of his superiors to the letter, willingly engaging the Iroquois in close alliance to the Crown and fought alongside them as necessary. He had no stated reservations about their quality or courage. His entire career was based on his ability to negotiate with the Iroquois and to bring them out in war on the side of the British.

Swiggett does not seem to see this, nor does he seem to see much value in the Iroquois alliance, or in the Iroquois:

The land was cursed by the Indian presence, yet unquestionably it was their land, and, unless Whig and Tory had deferred their war until the Indian was exterminated, it is hard to see how he was to be excluded from it. Probably

every white man in North America at the time wanted the Indians shoved west of the Mississippi and back and back until he was no more . . . It was an inescapable tragedy.<sup>224</sup>

Possibly Swiggett was trying to state the case in the language of the contemporary actors, and used *exterminate* in the sense of its Latin root, *to drive out*, rather than genocide. Indians were regarded as Canaanites by the disciples of manifest destiny—at best to be swept aside and left in peace to dwindle to nothing. At no time, however, does he acknowledge the separate *nationality* of the Iroquois or the other tribes. Like deer, they inhabit the country and like wolves they make it dangerous to live in.

In a general way the Indian Superintendencies preserved law and order in the red lands before the Revolution.<sup>225</sup>

Law and order were preserved *in the red lands* by the Indians themselves; the Superintendents were necessary to settle disputes, usually over property rights, between Indians and whites. *The Great White Father* was a courtesy name given to a *foreign* head of state by the diplomatists of the Iroquois nation, who had their own elected leaders. One of them, at the time far from a great one, was Joseph Brant.

Now with the connivance of Londoners who had never seen any Indian but Brant who was a cri there, painted by Romney, Major Butler's influence is to be secretly undermined and the savages are to be incited to revenge. . . The Johnson Dynasty had taken Brant into itself, though some said he was there by right of blood, certainly by informal family connection. The Butlers plainly did not consider him as good as they were, and distrusted him into the bargain.<sup>226</sup>

No wonder, since Brant was a player himself. If one accepts Brant as an independent actor, associated with, but not dominated by, the Johnson faction, one must also accept the Iroquois as un beholden to the Crown, and free agents. Swiggett regards Brant a mere puppet for the Johnson interests. He repeats the casual slander that Brant was one of Sir William Johnson's children: *though some said he was there by right of blood*, apparently unaware that Brant's



status among his people rested on his Iroquois lineage and connections, particularly his sister Molly, who appears here only as the mistress of Sir William Johnson and not as the counselor—more influential than her brother—of the Six Nations.

Brant and Butler are rivals. Butler is the hero of Swiggett's story, but it does not follow automatically that Brant is the villain in any retelling of Butler's story. It did not seem so to Cruikshank. In fact both men in more sophisticated dramaturgy might be portrayed as mirror images, two faces of the same coin; like a Hal and Hotspur not fated to meet fatally.

Their opposition in fact was based in Indian Department politics and ambitions, common to every organization, and manifested itself in nothing stronger than a harsh exchange or two and written complaints. Their opposition in history and legend is the work of the chroniclers. They reported the tales and rumors of the Mohawk Valley, and in those rumors the raiders were always Butler and Brant. Every Tory was Butler and every Iroquois was Brant; they were reported, like birds, to be in two or three places at once; they were reported together when they were hundreds of miles apart. Their legendary duality was also in temperament; Butler's cruelty was mirrored by Brant's humanity.

Butler and his cutthroats had just entered a house in Cherry Valley, the mistress of which was then lying in childbed, and ordered both the mother and infant to be butchered. At that moment Brant, coming up, cried out, "What, kill a woman and child! No, that child is not an enemy to the King, nor a friend to Congress. Long before he will be big enough to do any mischief, the dispute will be settled." He then set a guard on the door and thus saved the lives of both parent and child.

These facts were communicated to me by the Rev. Mr Kirkland.<sup>227</sup>

Swiggett notes this contribution from President Dwight with disgust, but he need only report it and refute it—it is an obvious elaboration on the story of Katy Shankland at Cherry Valley. He really need only report the actual facts as attested in primary sources, and leave the report of their misuse for a bibliographical essay—he does include one. On the

second page of his first chapter he stops to chide Jephtha Simms:

. . . Simms, the gossip of the Revolution, in *The Frontiersmen of New York*,  
tiresome in the multiplicity of its detail . . .<sup>228</sup>

Simms had no training other than that literacy necessary to set up as a rural schoolteacher. Simms only reported what was said, and by whom. When he chose to moralize, it is clear where he does so. In his basic way, Simms is a Whig historian; he believes that humanity progresses upward and that history is the proof of it. Once this country was savage and bloody, now commerce and agriculture work peacefully where blood flowed freely. Swiggett is a doubting Whig; he believes in progress but he is aware that somewhere along the way progress swept away some of the good things of the past.

In considering the intellectual and social gap between the Tryon County gentry who were later to declare for the King, and the average Palatine peasant who declared for liberty, and was dragged into one of “the most craven and wretched” of all the worthless Revolutionary militia, we are for the first time faced with the necessity of forgetting the ancient grudges and our ancient reverence for everyone living in the Revolution who was not a Tory. But to recognize that the Butlers, before the Revolution, appear to have been decent successful people, infinitely more “socially valuable”, as the psychologists say, than the run of those who later opposed them, does not mean that the Revolution was an error in judgment, or need not have occurred. But it did not have to occur because “bad people” were oppressing “good people.”<sup>229</sup>

With *socially valuable* we are in 1929 and the land of the Jukes and Kallikaks. While it is clear that the Butlers dined off finer china than the Palatine emigrant farmers, it is less clear how that made them more valuable to their society. Swiggett here ignores the views of Harold Frederic, whose work he finds useful otherwise. Frederic tries to show that each person’s life has value to themselves and their society regardless of their dinner service, and that people who think otherwise divorce themselves from the American ideal.

Swiggett disdains the base metal, the majority of citizens in the Mohawk Valley who

rejected the leadership of the Johnsons and the Butlers, but then he also disdains the Johnsons, the Iroquois and Joseph Brant.

At Cherry Valley it was Brant who won praise for alleviating the excesses of the massacre, despite Butler's and others' efforts to do the same. Because of this, it was not enough to raise Butler's stature; it became necessary to denigrate Brant. Swiggett relates the story of their forces meeting just prior to the raid, but he omits the story of Butler's demand that Brant's volunteers enlist in the Rangers or be treated as deserters, and Brant's advice to his men that they slip away. Whose ever fault that may be, the combined force lost nearly a hundred veterans. In another one of his modal present perfects Swiggett states that

He (Brant) had not been at Wyoming, and John Butler may well have told his son that his own control of the Indians there was due in part to Brant's absence.<sup>230</sup>

Like the naive historians Simms or Lossing, Swiggett much overestimates Brant's status among the Iroquois. Even among his own people, his authority extending only as far as his power of personality and argument, and any other Iroquois would have been amused by any pretensions to command, as Brant well knew—it was the Seneca, after all, who led the Iroquois in war, and two Seneca war chiefs were present at Cherry Valley.

The story of the raid and massacre is told. Butler's efforts are highlighted. On the return to Niagara Swiggett notes that the Iroquois demanded some of the captives and notes

It is hard to believe that the Indians were not incited by their great war chief Joseph Brant, or that he could have controlled them had he wished. Years later, when Brant visited old John Fonda at Caughnawaga, Fonda censured him, Simms says, for his cruelty at Cherry Valley. Brant "said the atrocities were mostly chargeable to Walter Butler."

What more easy for a savage, who was to murder his own son, than to charge the dead Butler with his crimes?<sup>231</sup>

This is probably the worst example of Swiggett's lies. The fact is that in 1795 Brant's son Isaac, in a drunken rage, attacked his father with a knife; Brant defended himself with his own knife; his son died two days later. No one in Ontario from Lt. Governor Simcoe on down regarded it as anything more than a family tragedy.<sup>232</sup> Any biography of Brant available to Swiggett would have concurred. This is the touchstone; no person with any knowledge of the facts may continue without deep reservations about the value of this book. Swiggett wrote on the previous page

The secondary histories have strained so to blacken Walter Butler's name at Cherry Valley that at times they have lost all balance.<sup>233</sup>

Perhaps that slander was his way of restoring balance. Swiggett graduated from Yale; his education was Olympian compared to Jephtha Simms', and yet he makes a more basic mistake. He tries so hard to make his case that he deceives the reader. He has omitted facts, reports supposition as fact, and now, actually lies.

When, in his epic 1809 poem *Gertrude of Wyoming*, the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell placed Joseph Brant prominently among the perpetrators of the Wyoming (Pennsylvania) Massacre, his son John Brant wrote to Campbell, politely but firmly proving the fact that Brant was never at Wyoming. Campbell acknowledged his error and published an apology.<sup>234</sup> Despite the fact that he came from a large family and served in a unit whose men were prominently in settling the Niagara peninsula, no one published a defense of Walter Butler until 1893. If he was the man Swiggett describes—*a most dauntless and enterprising leader, eager, ambitious, tireless*—it might be thought strange that no comrade or admirer should come forth until 1893 to clear his name. It is a question Swiggett does not ask.

The real Walter Butler's story had been told already. He was a young man who passed from obscurity to brief wartime notoriety and then back into obscurity again. A study of his military career reveals a single episode in which he had an individual influence on the war. His raid on Cherry Valley, militarily speaking, was a success. Undertaken late in the season, deep in enemy territory, in the face of formidable physical hardships, it resulted in serious loss to the enemy with very little loss to his own force. The deaths of civilians, however regrettable, were the actions of a small portion of revenge seeking Seneca.

But with that raid he shot his bolt. Walter Butler was never again given an independent command. Given his own resolve never again to serve alongside Indians, he had effectively removed himself for consideration for such a command. He spent the rest of the war serving in subordinate positions directly under higher ranking officers, mainly his father.

It does not seem to have occurred to Swiggett that Walter Butler's service was not so much for King and Country as it was for the interests of the Butler family. He could have served the King anywhere in America, but on the Mohawk frontier his efforts would also serve his family, in their struggle with the Johnsons for the opportunities that came with high station in the Indian Department. Nor would he have been blamed for doing so. No one expected ambition to be selfless, or minded as long as personal and family advancement were achieved without unseemly greed or dishonesty. Swiggett began by telling us

The histories have contented themselves with denouncing him as a bloody monster, but back of the histories in the primary material of the Revolution there is an amazing figure. A young man who could not have been over twenty-eight when he was killed, to the rejoicing of all of New York, a most dauntless and enterprising leader, eager, ambitious, tireless, offering to cover Albany, Fort Pitt and Detroit for Haldemand, grasping early in the war the grand strategy of the long Northwestern flank, impatient of older men, defending his every action at Cherry Valley, scorning to make war on women and children, while pointing out the treatment of his mother and sister held

as hostages in Albany.<sup>235</sup>

The basis of this statement and others is not in the historical sources, but Edmond Rostand.

In the paragraph following his lie about Brant, Swiggett describes the morning after the day of the raid. As the raiders depart with the captives, he notes

Seventy-six years ago, that day, Queen Anne had ridden in state through the city of London to give thanks at St. Paul's for the great victory of James Butler, Duke of Ormonde, in Spain. Walter Butler standing in the snow and mud, the smell of burnt timbers and damp earth in his nostrils, may have recalled it. His pride in the Ormonde Butlers was very great and his disillusionment at the massacre and his military failure must have been almost overwhelming.<sup>236</sup>

*His pride in the Ormonde Butlers* appears in none of his letters or journals, or in

Cruikshanks' article. Swiggett's only source for this statement is Harold Frederic's *In the Valley*. Douw describes his relationship with Walter Butler:

We had always liked each other, doubtless in that we were both of a solemn and meditative nature. We had not much else in common, it is true, for he was filled to the nostrils with pride about the Ormonde-Butlers, whom he held to be his ancestors, and took it rather hard that I should not also be able to revere them for upholding a false-tongued king against the rights of his people.

For my own part, I did not pin much faith upon his descent, being able to remember his grandfather, the old lieutenant, who seemed a peasant to the marrow of his bones.<sup>237</sup>

Swiggett acknowledges that this is from a novel published more than one hundred years after Butler's death, written by a man born in 1850. He excuses his quotation with these words:

It is unlikely that Frederic had any written authority now in existence which has not been consulted for the present book. To a man living in 1890, however, there were living links to the Revolution hard to realize 40 years later. Men were then living who, when fifteen, could have talked of the Revolution with grandfathers born in the year of Walter Butler's birth. If, as is the case, the Revolution is a living interest today to the old families of the Mohawk, there were vital legends about everywhere then with which Frederic

must have been familiar. He may have talked to Lossing, or Simms, and they had both talked to veterans said to have been in the Canada Creek action . . . Frederic may have had access to material of this kind which is no longer in existence.

There is nothing in Frederic's novel to establish his sources, other than the internal evidence of events related along the lines of known texts—nor need there be, since he's writing a novel. His oral sources, if any, are unknown. *Lossing, or Simms* are the same historians Swiggett lambastes as gossips and sensationalizers, and there is no evidence that Frederic talked to them either. There is nothing to show that Frederic used anything other than novels like *Henry Esmond* or his own imagination to create the lineage obsessed Walter Butler of *In the Valley*.

The Ormonde-Butlers, Walter Butler's supposed pride, and as Frederic noted, a pride with a basis in self-deception or social posturing—Swiggett does not quote the passage but reports the pride, but not Douw's deflation—were Jacobites. The last Jacobite rebellion had taken place less than thirty years before and the Pretender was still alive and plotting; the sons of condemned or exiled Jacobites were trying to cleanse the family disloyalty by raising regiments for service in the American war. A Jacobite connection was the last thing a man would boast of if he wished to rise in the King's service.

It was not historical curiosity that drove Swiggett to study Walter Butler; it was a fascination with the character of Walter Butler as created by Robert W. Chambers, based on the outline of the historical record and the previous characterization by Harold Frederic. At some point Swiggett could see that the historical documents did not support that characterization. He could have given up his biography for his other options.

He could have written a novel, but he seems to think that Chambers had done all that was possible in that line. Swiggett reexamined Chambers' novels, which he had read in

his youth, for references; if he actually re-read them after his maturity, after Yale, and still found them worthwhile, he cannot have had very much judgment in regard to historical fiction.

Instead he wrote what Ann Wroe called her book about Pontius Pilate: *the biography of an imaginary man*. He wrote a documentary novel about Walter Butler, using a heavy framework of historical fact upon which he laid his fiction, patched together from the novels of Frederic and Chambers, and any story or legend, or fragmentary passages from letters, which he can use to create his own fictional character. He gives the name of Walter Butler to the boyish daydream, held onto in manhood, of a young Anglophile growing up in the Ohio valley tobacco country; a young paladin, unique in courage, intelligence and sensibility, as all of us are when we are young.

It is fascinating to consider whether Washington might have had Walter Butler's restless energy, his will to win, his military ardor, on his side, if Butler had gone to Yale.<sup>238</sup>

A sentence like that can only be written by a man who thinks he was born in the wrong century.

In his acknowledgements, Swiggett thanks many people, including his former neighbor Nicholas Roosevelt, American Minister to Hungary—in case the reader had any doubts about the standing of the author—but he notes only one demurrer:

It is difficult to speak adequately of the help Mr. Robert W. Chambers has given me . . . He is not in agreement with many conclusions of the book as he thinks, in his own phrase, that in giving devils their due I have, in places, hustled the angels.<sup>239</sup>

*War Out of Niagara: Walter Butler and the Tory Rangers* was published by Columbia University Press in 1933. It was twentieth in the series of the Empire State Historical Publications, edited by Professor Dixon Ryan Fox of Columbia University. The foreword was written by



Colonel John Buchan MP, the future Lord Tweedsmuir, who praised Swiggett's *sound scholarship . . . judicial integrity. . . used with scrupulous fairness, never over-stating an argument or over-colouring a picture.*<sup>240</sup> Evan Thomas, who reviewed it for *Books*, called it *. . . one of the most valuable contributions to Revolutionary and to frontier history that has appeared in recent years,*<sup>241</sup> a sentiment echoed by the reviewer for the New York Times: *. . . a vital contribution to a less well-known section of the history of the Revolution. His rehabilitation of Walter Butler after all these years can be placed, for cheerful comparison, alongside some of the debunking biographies of the time.*<sup>242</sup>

Less cheerful authorities had other opinions. Arthur Pound regretted the missed opportunity to write a broader work about the sweep of war across the Mohawk Valley. Acknowledging Swiggett's industry in bringing new facts to light, Pound noted *" . . . their presentation suffers from too direct aim at a target, which, after all, is relatively inconsequential."*<sup>243</sup>

Samuel McKee Jr. of Columbia noted that

Mr. Swiggett's description of the revolutionary conflict in northwestern New York is a valuable addition to the history of the war and also to the history of the American frontier. Occasionally, it is true, the book suggests that an air of incompleteness in the story is attributable to a lack of evidence.

He continues, to note that at one point Montgomery's capture of Montreal and the fall of Fort Washington on the Hudson are said to have occurred on the same day rather than the same date. In the next sentence McKee ends his review praising the editorship of Columbia colleague Dixon Fox, in a possible example of one kind or another of college politics.<sup>244</sup>

Harsher still was a judgment in the *Canadian Historical Review*, a periodical one might think would regard with favor an attempt to rehabilitate a Loyalist demon. The author complained of

. . . an unfortunate leaning towards sensation, romance and declamation. His frequent attempts to supply an imaginary historical background become

tiresome and are not always convincing. Sympathy for the Butlers and prejudice against what he delights to call 'the Johnson Dynasty' has distorted his judgment . . . His account of the Battle of Oriskany, for instance, is extremely inaccurate.<sup>245</sup>

Thus Ernest Cruikshank, who had written Butler's story forty years before.

The faint damns of the professional historians may not have been enough to alert the general reading public, who would have given more weight to the racy review in the *Times*, or the imprimatur of John Buchan and the nihil obstat of Columbia. Cruikshank was literally farther off the map, a voice from the attic. Specialists in New York history might warn their graduate students to seek primary sources, but one went farther, and it may have been a measure of the pitfall this book represented to the serious student.

Barbara Graymont published *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* in 1972, a sound, modern survey of the topic, described as "definitive" by at least one scholarly reviewer. In her bibliographical essay, she evaluates the materials available to students of the Iroquois and the New York Revolutionary frontier.

A work that promises much but offers little because of its extremely slipshod scholarship and deliberate distortion of fact is Howard Swiggett, *War Out of Niagara: Walter Butler and the Tory Rangers*.

She goes on to describe his aims—the first, to rehabilitate the frontier Loyalists: reasonable, but accomplished more successfully by other authors.

In his second aim—to discredit Brant and the Indians—he displayed little or no knowledge of Indian history or ethnology and completely whitewashed John Butler's role in recruiting the Indians for the King's service. Swiggett's constant falsifications, continual resort to surmise instead of facts, and sketchy use of primary sources place his work in the realm of fiction rather than serious history.

Graymont ends her remarks with an endorsement of a *much sounder* work: Ernest Cruikshank's *The History of Butler's Rangers and the Settlement of Niagara*.<sup>246</sup> Her evaluation of other works is nuanced and temperate. She is exactly right, and says what Pound and McKee

should have said outright 40 years before; she does the job of editing that Professor Knox and Columbia University Press failed to do.

Twelve years later Isabel Kersey published her scholarly biography of Joseph Brant. Nowhere in it does Swiggett or his book appear. Like Graymont, her sources are mainly primary; unlike Graymont, she does not feel the need to warn her readers of Swiggett's book. Perhaps by this time the word is out, or the book has fallen into disuse, or has been discarded, both the 1933 original and the 1963 reprint.

This is a good thing for history, but a bad thing for historians. Every aspiring historian needs to see what a trap looks like. *War Out of Niagara* should remain on the shelves, as a constant reproach to historians who would rather write novels, to editors who would rather not examine every footnote, to students impressed by an imprint and, of course, to all lovers of intellectual frailty.

Howard Swiggett died March 8, 1957. His most recent novel was running as a serial in the *Ladies Home Journal* prior to its publication on June 12, and was the Book-of-the-Month selection for July. Two novels of his prior to this had both been best sellers; *The Strongbox* had been successfully adapted on television by Studio One; *The Power and the Prize* had been a selection of the Reader's Digest Book Club, and been adapted as a motion picture starring Robert Taylor the year previous. Prior to this wave of success he had honed his craft as a writer of detective novels and popular history—a history of the French Foreign Legion, and the Pinkerton Detective Agency, biographies of George Washington and Gouverneur Morris. Neither of his obituaries consulted mentioned *War Out of Niagara*.<sup>24</sup>

Little of his output survives today. Most libraries discard unused books without regard to merit, and Swiggett's novels and books are more interesting as touchstones of contemporary taste than as art. As it is, the easiest of his works to find in an old book store

is a condensed version of *The Power and the Prize*, which appears in *Reader's Digest Condensed Books for 1954*.

However, the easiest of all of Swiggett's books to buy is the Scholar's Bookshelf's 2005 reprint of *War Out of Niagara*. Any online bookstore can sell you a copy for \$29.95; adjusted for inflation, that may be cheaper than the \$3.50 it cost in 1934. The historian is appalled and the antiquarian bookseller disappointed, but the lover of irony—particularly obscure, Borgesian jests—is delighted.

*Howard Swiggett was not a lightweight. He was a successful businessman and best-selling author. His business novels are tightly plotted and intelligently constructed. Yet with his first published work, War Out of Niagara, he committed undergraduate errors and allowed his premise to overrule otherwise sound instincts and even the advice of the author who set him on his path. His obsession with a fictitious character that happened to bear the name of a real man caused him to make errors of judgment that would have bankrupted him in business.*

*Others have written biographies of fictional characters—Sherlock Holmes, Horatio Hornblower, Elizabeth Darcy—filling in the blanks left by their creators. The amateur version of this genre, prolific on the internet, is called fan fiction. Good or bad, no one mistakes it for fact. Swiggett convinced himself that his fan fiction was fact. He convinced others as well, based on the publisher and some of the reviews. Only a few specialists caught him at the time, not enough to cause a scandal.*

*Theses without a basis in evidence, incomplete editing and peer reviews, lax publishing standards even by scholarly presses and perfunctory reviews are still with us, as the sad case of Michael Bellisles indicates. Their causes are various, but tend to arise from a political or social viewpoint, or time invested in a thesis that proves untenable. War Out of Niagara is almost unique as a scholarly work arising from a fictional obsession, that stayed fiction. Perhaps librarians, instead of removing it from their shelves, can simply reclassify it and place it on the shelf with Swiggett's other novels.*

*There is no doubt now that he believed every word he wrote. Swiggett's book is rooted in the fascination with a character created by Robert W. Chambers. Chambers was a fluent popular novelist, a very long way from a great one. Yet he was able to create and furnish Swiggett's fascination with a fictional character, perhaps Chambers' one true creation and a tribute to the potency of cheap fiction.*

*Now the culture seems to have lost entirely the whole matter of Cherry Valley, having lost the factual basis behind the one element remaining. If it stopped here, the circle would be complete, from scrupulous fact to utter fiction.*

*The earliest annalists tried to tell their story honestly to honor the participants; the latest writer regards the settlers and the Iroquois as contemptible and creates from another author's whole cloth a fictional Butler because the actual one is inadequate, another kind of contempt. The academy, the supposed guardian of the culture, does little or nothing to right the situation to this point, and with its publishing imprint, makes things worse by lending Swiggett's book a scholarly veneer.*

*The field was left to the amateurs. Fortunately, one came forth.*

## Chapter Eleven: Walter D. Edmonds: *Drums Along the Mohawk*, 1936

*Of all the professional authors discussed in this study, the least assuming would appear to be Walter Dumaux Edmonds. He did not call his work "serious," or consider himself a member of any school. He was self-critical to an extent that would have bewildered a man like Chambers. He decided in middle age that he had written himself out as a novelist, long before his name under the title had stopped selling books, and stopped writing adult novels.*

*Yet that same self-doubt led him to write a novel that reversed a half-century of dishonesty in the telling of the story of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk frontier. After failing to write a novel "to plan," he gave himself up to the sources, the histories and the rude annals created by rustics. From those sources, he wrote a fine and honest novel of the real struggles of the real people of a long lost time and place.*

Walter Edmonds' first novel *Rome Haul*, is a more or less picaresque story of the days of the Erie Canal, though he says he never made the canal trip and that almost the whole story was imagined. His novels since then have all been historical and all have dealt with upstate New York. They have, I think, come out of the fantasies of a boyhood imagination under the influence of the peculiar spell of the country in which he lives. He depended, in these novels, very much on conventional patterns, and his books became best sellers; but the forests and fields and snows, the unexpected changes of weather, the rural speech of the people and the behavior of the wild and domestic animals, are recorded with perfect accuracy from intimate observation.

Edmund Wilson<sup>248</sup>

To those who may feel that here is a great to-do about a bygone age, I have one last word to say. It does not seem to me to be a bygone age at all.

Walter D. Edmonds<sup>249</sup>

There are many indicators of the popularity of the historical novel in the 1920's and 1930's. They appear often in the yearly top ten best seller lists for the decades. There is the singular example of *Gone with the Wind*, not the great American novel, but certainly the biggest. There are the star-studded epic pictures now encountered only on Turner Classic

Movies, such as *Anthony Adverse*, *Northwest Passage* or *Reap the Wild Wind*, whose florid trailers proudly cite their now-forgotten best selling sources. On the sale shelf of an old bookstore one may encounter the likes of *The Sun is My Undoing*, by Marguerite Steen, a thick (1176 pages) romance of the Bristol slave trade, and see that it sold 600,000 copies and spent two years on the top ten bestseller lists.

One small but telling indicator is 1929's *Cup of Gold*, a novel about the buccaneer king Sir Henry Morgan, a Sabatini-like romance of the Sack of Panama and Morgan's doomed quest for the most beautiful woman in the Americas, *La Santa Roja*, the Red Saint. Unlike *The Sun is My Undoing* or many of the other epics noted, *Cup of Gold* remains in print. It is John Steinbeck's first novel and the only book he ever wrote about pirates.

There is a suggestion that he wrote it for the movies, and hoped to strike it rich, like every other idiot who writes for the movies. It was short, 240 pages, almost a treatment with descriptions. The standard was set a few years later in 1934 by Hervey Allen, whose *Anthony Adverse* came in at 1224 pages: Jacobite exiles in Italy, Spanish Dons, opera singers, Napoleon, the slave trade, bastards, and two years on the top ten best seller list. At a time when 5000 copies sold made a best seller, *Anthony Adverse* sold around a million copies, and is credited with rescuing many bookstores from insolvency during the Depression.<sup>250</sup>

These are romances, novels with a whiff of history and a confidence in popular historical ignorance as crutches. If *Henry Esmond* was a Victorian Restoration novel, it was at least well-written and populated by psychological complex characters. The romances offer diversion, at more or less greater length, and descriptions of appetites tantalized and sated. As in the movies of C.B. deMille, it became possible to portray nearly any kind of depravity so long as someone was seen to go to heaven by the ending.

When David Hackett Fischer was asked his opinion of Mel Gibson's *The Patriot*, he

prefaced it with the simile that *The Patriot* was to history what *Godzilla* was to biology.<sup>251</sup>

Historians and cultural gatekeepers of the 1930's had the same feelings about historical novels, but could not express them with so acute an example. They had been able to ignore the self-evident romances of Robert W. Chambers or Winston Churchill, but the new wave of best-sellers was widely read and claimed more historical veracity. People were starting to ask their opinions, or worse, expressing their own opinions without recourse to serious scholars. The authors themselves had come to regard themselves as authorities, even historians, proudly appending their sources.

When Allen Nevins gave Kenneth Roberts' *Northwest Passage* a negative review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, Roberts complained to a friend that Nevins did not know his place; . . . *he was removing himself from his own side of the bed. He ought to be put back on his own side of the bed where he belongs.* The phrases *jealous little pisspot* and *complete prick* also appeared.<sup>252</sup>

No one had subjected Chambers to that kind of scrutiny, especially professional historians. Roberts may have resented the attention but he should have enjoyed the complement of the visitation from Olympus and continued crying all the way to the bank. It was the historians who were threatened, in their role as the keepers of national tradition. Amateurs were attempting to supplant them, or make them seem boring and irrelevant. The fact that historians like Nevins could complain all they wanted, and not even dent sales, was less important to the novelists than the new men coming up with their own novels, which could.

They gave Crumbs Along the Mohawk page 1 a couple of months ago, & mebbe you can imagine how that burned me up.—Kenneth Roberts<sup>253</sup>

The new man's name was Walter D. Edmonds.

My life has little to recommend it, I'm afraid, for it has been smooth sailing right along.—Walter Edmonds<sup>254</sup>



He was born in 1903 in Boonville, New York, on the northern edge of the Mohawk Valley. He grew up on the family farm there, except for winters in New York City, where his father was a patent attorney. He went to some good schools—Cutler, St. Paul's, Choate—and then to Harvard.

At Harvard, however, my chief interest became the Harvard Advocate, of which I ultimately became president, and on which I think I spent more time and effort than on my studies.<sup>255</sup>

He paid enough attention to his studies to take Charles Townsend Copeland's composition class, in which he learned the trinity of English prose—Swift, Defoe and Bunyan—and had one of his assignments published by *Scribner's Magazine*.

Luck has always played into my hands so far.<sup>256</sup>

After accepting a luncheon invitation by George Lorimer, editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, to discuss some stories Edmonds submitted, Lorimer told him that he could become a regular writer for the *Post*. Lorimer then asked him if he knew what that meant. *Post* writers soon acquired financial stability and a regular working schedule: so many words per story, so many stories a year, as well as name recognition and a useful endorsement on book jackets: *The Saturday Evening Post* writer. But Lorimer told him that once he started writing magazine fiction, he might write no other way, or find the security too comfortable; or, growing as a writer, outgrow the home he had made for himself. Perhaps he should begin by writing in his own, and see afterwards if that way was acceptable for the *Post*.

Title, chapter heading, and the opening sentence came out without a pause, and by lunchtime that first morning Chapter One was finished. And the book never stopped writing at that pace. By the end of February the manuscript of 100,000 words was done, and in between I had taken a week off to do a story for the Atlantic.<sup>257</sup>

*Rome Haul* was the title. It was a book about a youth working on the Erie Canal in the 1830's.

The *Atlantic* bought the serial rights on pure spec, Marc Connelly adopted it as a play and the play was bought by the movies.

Then abashed by the case of the first novel, and critical cries of “formlessness”, he drew up an outline for his second novel, *The Big Barn*, the story of a Mohawk Valley dynast whose ambition built the greatest barn in the region—based on an actual building in Boonville—and the inability of his sons to live up to his dream. It was not successful, and after a third novel which he destroyed, Edmonds junked the outline midway through his fourth, *Erie Water*, which did sell. He had used the outline until it seemed to him a strait jacket, junked it and went off again following his characters as they led him.

By now Edmonds had established a method and a reputation. He would do extensive research into a topic, mull it over until a narrative presented itself and then write the narrative. His first novel had not come to him overnight. It had been the result of years of reading and research into the history of his home place—at first casual, later intensive. Once the writing began, the research ended; consulting the research, aside from checking a fact, ended. He called it *mental digestion*; today we might call it immersion. It is what an actor might do to prepare for a role; in Edmonds’ case it meant determining the frame of reference for a man born at some point in the past, and then entering into that frame to write.<sup>258</sup>

Edmonds thought himself fortunate to have been born into a place that had so much history to write about: the frontier exchange brought about by the fur trade; the wars with the French and the most powerful of North American First Nations, the Iroquois; the opening of the New York frontier and the Revolution’s longest campaign; and the revolution in transportation and social movement brought on by the Erie Canal: Wilson’s *the peculiar spell of the country*.

However interesting the past times of his home place must have seemed to him, and to his readers, to the critics he must have seemed doubly damned; not simply a *historical* novelist, but a *regional historical* novelist. He noted the critics, who usually praised his work, but never in the earthshaking terms that they reserved for the contemporary giants like Hemingway. He put more stock in his own judgment, and shielded himself by diffidence:

My writing is not ‘significant’, and I belong to no cliques.<sup>259</sup>

He is really, as I was told, very shy, and he leans over backwards not to make any pretensions. He seems to me a curious person. He will admit to no real interest in literature, seems only to read historical novels, as if following the stock market of his own investments . . . He claims that he does no research in preparation for his New York State novels, but gets them all from old anecdotes that the local people have told him: but I know from the people at Hamilton College that this is not quite true.

Edmund Wilson<sup>260</sup>

Edmonds differentiated the historical novel from the romance by noting that a romance tended to be

. . . more concerned with problem of flour for the hair than flour for the belly and not interested in underwear unless it is a lady’s preferably in process of removal. . . . I was not dealing with Schuyler or Arnold or Gates, but with people who were trying to preserve their families and ideals and barns in the midst of war . . .<sup>261</sup>

Barns again, but you cannot write a novel about farmers without knowing that you judge the industry of a farmer by the look of his barn and not his house. He is talking now about the research and writing of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, his novel about the five years ordeal of the Mohawk Valley farmers during the Revolution.

It was not *smooth sailing*. The first draft went to 150 pages before he realized *that the people were not in the book* and that what he had written “. . . was almost exactly like Robert W. Chambers (whose books are great fun to read but have little to do with life as it was.)”

He went back and read for six months, and started again. This time he realized that *I was writing of the past. The people were not alive in their own day, but seemed to be looking back at it as I was.* Before he was through, he had 800 typed pages of false starts and dead ends.

He stopped reading the secondary history. Instead he went directly to the original sources. He recommended particularly *The Minute Book of the Committee of Safety* of Tryon County. He learned what the taxes were, and how they went up to pay for the war; what happened to a man's face after he had been scalped, and what he paid the doctor to fix it if he survived; the crops that were planted, and harvested, and how much money they would bring.

This is what he wrote.

#### **Gilbert Martin and Wife, Magdalana: 1776**

Gilbert Martin has broken land for a farm in the Deerfield settlement, the westernmost cultivation in the Mohawk Valley. On a trip east to the older village of Fox Mills, he meets, courts, and marries Magdalana Borst, an 18 year old girl from a Palatine family. He is himself without family. This part of the story is seen through the point of view of Magdalana; *Lana* on all but her wedding day, and hereafter.

At a time when most people traveled less than ten miles from the place they were born, Lana observes the progression from relative settlement to relative frontier during the forty mile journey to Deerfield. Drawn behind their wagon is a cow. Gilbert—Gil—had to decide between a clock and a cow as his wedding present to his wife. A fine clock in the house would have pleased her, but what use is a clock to a farmer? The cow will bring increase, and milk for their first born.

They break their journey at Rose's, a public house, where they hear people talking about valley politics, and the escape of the Johnsons from imminent arrest. A stranger, with

a patch over one eye, talks about the uselessness of the Congress. His name is Caldwell. The menace he embodies, though, is nothing compared to the horseflies they start to encounter.

Lana is so glad to end the journey at Deerfield that the smallness of Gil's cabin does not appall her at first. She tries to relieve its bareness with a gift from her mother, a peacock feather that is the wonder of the neighborhood. Her neighbors are the industrious Weavers, the less industrious Realls, and the Demooths, the local militia Captain and his wife, who is still a little dazed at being taken from her gentle home to a settlement of cabins with Indians walking around. Lana submits to being put in her place by Mrs. Captain Demooth, complaining only afterward to Gil.

Demooth talks to Gil, familiarly, about the flight of the Tory magnates and their probable return.

"When it comes to war, if it does, it won't be King and Congress up here, Gil, as much as us against the Butlers and Johnsons. They don't give a damn about Congress and I don't know that I do about the King. But they do hate our people as having settled on the best land in the Mohawk Valley".<sup>262</sup>

"Who gives a damn for the Stamp Tax, come to think of it? How much money have you paid out to it yourself?"

"That's so," said Gil, wonderingly. "It ain't bothered me." He looked up at the captain. "Why do we have to go and fight the British at all?"

"Because, now the war's started, people like the Butlers and Johnsons will be in power if they win and they'll take it out of our hides, the cost of it."<sup>263</sup>

Gil is dismayed by the prospect of being taken from useful work on his farm to help settle a dispute between the gentry, but these are his people and he will march with them. A few days later he attends the muster. Lana helps him get ready. She's wary of his musket, a thing that seems to have its own power, and insists on washing his "filthy dirty" hunting shirt. She admires his appearance as he sets off, and knows he will not think of her all day.

Gil and Reall, on their way to the muster, pass the manor house abandoned by the Cosbys, Tory refugees, and the nearby store of John Wolff, a minor Tory, hitherto non-

threatening. There they see two Iroquois—not the local Mohawks or the neighboring Oneida, but strangers from the west, perhaps even Senecas, reputed eaters of men. At the muster they report the Seneca, and the militia goes back to inspect them. They are gone and Wolff is unhelpful and insolent. The militia decides to search the Cosby house, despite, or because of, John Wolff's warning about what the Cosbys will do when they return.

They are all properly awed at their first glimpse of how the gentry live, but soon begin to disturb the furniture in their search, and pocket spoons and suchlike. Gil goes off alone and finds his way to the attic, empty but for a bed and two chimneys. A man has been here; Gil can tell by the faint scent of tobacco.

It hadn't been an Indian. The bed would have had the sickish sweet smell, a little greasy, that Indians had. It had been a white man.<sup>264</sup>

He looks around, and finds a piece of black cloth on a chimney ledge. He has to look at it a while to realize it is an eye patch.

John Wolff is arrested, for harboring King's people. On his way home, Gil sees his cabin from far off, and realizes for the first time how lonely it looks. He tells Lana of the arrest and the patch. She is frightened and he chides her for not staying with the Weavers while he was away at muster. They hear their mare start and Gil looking outside, sees a man in the darkness.

“Who is it?”

“The mare acts like it was an Indian.”

“How do you mean?”

“See her stomp her hoof? She doesn't like their smell.”

Lana reacts fearfully, and Gil betrays his own fear.

“Well, you needn't act like a scared bitch just because a horse has seen a man.”<sup>265</sup>

It is the first harsh thing he's said to her, but he doesn't notice her reaction.

“It’s Blue Back, Lana,” and stepped outdoors. “Hello there, Mr. Blue Back.”

An old Oneida comes into the light.

“How!” he gave Gil greeting. “You fine? I’m fine.” He shook hands with satisfaction.

Gil introduces Lana, who bows her head.

The man’s smell had already taken possession of the room. It was sweetish and greasy. If water had ever touched him, she thought, it had only been when wading the creek . . .

Out of rum, Gil offers Blue Back milk. Lana fetches it wordlessly but will not pour it, leaving Gil to pour. Blue Back does not seem to see. He looks at the peacock feather. Gil asks him what he’s doing up this way. Blue Back tells him of a hunt for a doe. In the woods he found the track of two Seneca, who seemed to have come from Cosby’s, which he followed to a place where they met a man weaving shoes, and they all went west. He will keep an eye out for more tracks. If Gill sees two fires on the hill, he is to warn Demooth. The Senecas warned the Oneidas that they should keep quiet about Seneca traffic coming this way. Gil thanks him.

Blue Back said that it was all right. “Like you. Fine friends. Me. You. Fine.”

They go outside to get some of the venison Blue Back has brought Gil. Blue Back also gives him a willow switch to use on his impolite wife. Gil is embarrassed by Lana’s bad manners, and that Blue Back has noticed them. He wonders if he should use the switch. That night, going to bed, he confesses the fear that made him speak so to her, and she tells him that she was afraid because she’s pregnant.

The Tory John Wolff is tried. Gil must testify and he and Lana go to court. Lana watches him talking with the officers in his wedding coat and prays, “Oh, God, let Gil show up well before the gentry.” Gil tells of the search, the eye patch, and the man he saw wearing

one, Caldwell. Another witness tells of Rose's tavern again, and the people meeting there: he and Jones and a lame-handed man, going out and sitting the apple tree in Rose's yard. Then John Wolff testifies, calmly expressing his disdain for the whole proceeding. Then the young officer from Fort Stanwix presiding as judge thinks for a moment and delivers the verdict of guilty and the punishment of death by firing squad.

There is a flurry of activity by Wolff's relatives at the unexpected sentence and it is commuted to imprisonment in the Simsbury mines in Connecticut. Captain Demooth sends a note to Lana to tell her this; it is carried by the housemaid Nancy Schuyler, a pretty, simpleminded young woman.

Blue Back is in the woods, tracking a deer. As he follows it he thinks of how the skin will please his wife, how he will present it to her and see her admire it and him before she cooks it for him. Before he goes to sleep he prays.

Our Father God, I am hungry, I want a good buck, I have been a good man, I will sell the horns to Demooth for a drink of rum, but I will give Kirkland a piece off the shoulder. But if it has twelve points I will give Kirkland a piece off the leg and not take his tobacco for a week. I am a good man. Forever and ever. Amen.<sup>266</sup>

Then to be safe he says an old prayer from the time before Kirkland.

The next morning Blue Back finds his deer and kills it, and begins to skin it without reloading his musket, so he is at a loss when the two men come out of the woods, rifles pointed at him. The first man blows on a small silver whistle, and other white men, and Seneca come up. The man with the whistle tells Blue Back that his name is Caldwell, and that he is looking for Deerfield Settlement. Blue Back says yes, he knows a shortcut. He explains it to the Seneca. The men leave with the front half of the deer (less the horns) to find Blue Back's shortcut—the one four miles longer than Blue Back's own route to Deerfield.



At Deerfield Gil is burning off the stumps for a new field. Lana brings him water.

She sees the work already done and the promise of a new field of grain.

They stood for a moment, looking together at the raging holocaust that had once been green trees. "Oh Gil!" she cried. "It's beautiful"

Soon afterwards, the burners see a figure coming towards them, Blue Back here to warn them of the raiders. They gather their families to find refuge in the stockade at Stone Arabia. Lana takes a last look back at their home and cornfields, and Gil tells not to look anymore. Blue Back remains behind to watch the raiders gather and destroy. He sees one kill the cow Gil brought with his new wife. The Martins' cabin is burned. Blue Back leaves and makes his way back home to the Oneida village, carrying the half of the deer he kept, and the peacock feather he took from the Martin's deserted cabin.

Lana rides the cart on the rugged path to the stockade. The things she stored on it are getting loose and Gil remarks angrily at the job she did. She starts to worry about what the jolting of the cart will do to her pregnancy. The loud confusion at the stockade unnerves her more; she seems to go into shock. Nothing the other women do can help her and she loses her child.

Gil is with the militia, cautiously moving up the path to see the wreckage left by the raiders. They know that nothing will be left of their own farms when they reach them. Gil talks to George Weaver about finding work by joining the army.

"I'd thought of that. But now I don't know. If people all join the army, who's going to look out for this country?"

"I didn't really believe it until now," Gil said. "It don't seem possible for a man to work as hard as I did, just for nothing."<sup>267</sup>

Cosby's manor is destroyed, with John Wolff's store, and his wife missing. There is no point in following the "destructives" and no point to their destruction; Cosby and Wolff were loyalists.

For the first time they began to realize that that there was no protection for them except in themselves.<sup>268</sup>

They return to the stockade and Gil learns about Lana and their loss. They spend the winter in a one room shack. Gil works on a farm for wages. Lana wants them to go back and live at her parents' house and start fresh there, but Gil is too proud. She is alone most of the day in the shack. They live on corn mush, salted once a week, and the milk that Nancy Schuyler manages to save from the Demooths. It is Nancy who first misses the peacock feather, which only adds to Lana's dark mood. Gil has told her that he wants to return to Deerfield in the spring. He doesn't understand her mood and lack of interest in his plans, or her reluctance at starting another child.

Stopping at Demooth's after a long hunt, Gil sits at the warm hearth, with simple, pretty Nancy. She brings him a cordial and he shares it with her, and puts his arm around her, and then pulls her close and kisses her. He feels her go limp in his embrace, and sees the vacancy in her pretty eyes. Dismayed at his own weakness, he leaves quickly for the shack where Lana is waiting with a plate of corn mush. He puts his share of the deer meat on the table and tells her to throw out the mush. She cooks the meat and serves it but does not eat with him. He demands that she eat, and tells her that she has to stop treating him "like this." She obeys him, eating reluctantly, and then afterwards, just as reluctantly, obeys him in the marital bed.

The next few weeks pass with barely a word between them. Gil can barely bring himself to look at her. Lana's obedience reminds him of a beaten dog. He tries to make it up to her by giving her a hair ribbon for Christmas, but her feigned pleasure at it sickens him and he rises to leave. Lana stands, barring the door, and he raises his clenched hand. Then he breaks down, telling her that it was wrong and that everything was his fault. She speaks

slowly, heavily, and owns that some of the fault was hers. Gil sees her girlishness gone forever. They go to the church, dead to the service and the sermon, the walls of the church frosted, dull winter light shining in, the air damp and chilly.

They sat side by side, untouching, yet close.<sup>269</sup>

It should be clear by now that we are no longer in the worlds created by Chambers or Frederic, or adopted by Griffith or Swiggett. Even the people that Lana thinks of as gentry have barely neighborhood prominence. Post-partum depression and marital rape were concepts in their infancy in 1936. Rustic degradation was a French notion; the “country” was still thought to enliven and revive the spirit, unless you were writing about the bleak modern prairies of Stephen Crane or Susan Glaspell. Edmonds’ realism is unforced nor is it for effect. It seems to come out of a thinking man’s reflection on the reality of life upon a frontier.

The remainder of the novel follows the course of the war in the Mohawk Valley. An armed embassy led by Nickolas Herkimer fails to dissuade the British-leaning Iroquois, personified by Joseph Brant, to remain neutral. The British, Loyalists and Iroquois attack Fort Stanwix, twenty miles from the settlements. The militia marches to relieve the siege and is ambushed by the Iroquois and Loyalists at Oriskany, ten miles from the fort. Nearly half the militia—virtually every able-bodied man in Tryon County, about 800 men—are casualties, with about 150 killed outright.

The Martins find better circumstances working for Sarah McKlenner, a doting, childless widow with a fine stone house, in time for Lana’s pregnancy. Walter Butler is captured while enlisting men for his father’s corps of rangers. John Wolff escapes from prison and makes his way into Iroquois country, searching for his wife, eventually to

Niagara, where he enlists in Butler's Rangers.

The raids on the Valley begin with the winter thaw. The next three years is a slow, steady whittling down of the settlements by small raiding parties attacking outlying farms, until the stockades are the centers of existence. The men and the younger women go out by day to work the fields and return at night. John Wolff participates in the raid on Cherry Valley, and witnesses its degeneration into massacre.

In 1779 the settlers are astonished to see an army from the east, the Sullivan Expedition, come into the Valley to attack the Iroquois; they had long since given up hope for any succor from the outside. The destruction of the Iroquois homelands does not achieve the object of intimidation; the raiders return the next spring and it all goes on as before. The year following that, 1781, shows the Valley at the breaking point, but also a new commander for the militia, Marinus Willet, who senses that the Loyalists and the Iroquois are at the breaking point as well, and directs the small force available to him so effectively that the raiders are repulsed and driven back. Walter Butler's death—arriving simultaneously with the news of Yorktown—seems to mark the end of the war.

The novel ends with a coda set in 1784, with Lana at her work around the house, her sons underfoot, Gil out at work in the fields of the recovered farm. Her eyes light on the broken peacock feather brought to her by Blue Back—he said he found it in the woods. She knows that nothing else will happen like that which has happened, and that they will never again leave their home.

Edmonds began his story simply, with the two young marrieds entering an apparent Eden salted with blackflies and hard work. Their name Martin could be British, Huguenot, German (Martinz), or Dutch (Maarten) in origin, the strains that populate the settled valley.

They do not live examined lives, nor are they given to metaphor. They look at the sky and measure the likelihood of rain or cold weather, and see little else. They have no politics other than the wish to be unhampered in their simple ambitions.

They are soon disappointed. On their journey home they encounter the stranger Caldwell, the man wearing an eye patch, who asks after politics. In Deerfield there is talk of strangers in the Valley and secret meetings with men not friendly to the Committee of Safety. The strangers are disguised with secret emblems, like a false lame limb, or an eye patch over a good eye. Searching the Cosby attic, Gil finds the cloth patch that covered Caldwell's eye. These details accrue through the first section, creating an underlying tension. The fear is not yet a solid reality, but strangers coming and going in the night. Lana is not afraid of the Oneida Blue Back; she comes from Klock's Mills, close by Fort Johnson, Sir William's great house, and has seen Indians before, but she is not willing to admit him so freely into her house. He smells differently and has different standards of cleanliness than white people, but he is not Other.

Blue Back (his English name is the local nickname for the blue jay) is different. Edmonds acknowledges the truth that deeply rooted cultures create differences between the races that can rarely or never be fully bridged. A *racist* believes that such differences confer inferiority; a *racialist* believes only that there are differences, and they confer inferiority only in their inability to respond to changed circumstances.

Blue Back, like the Martins, is a simple man, but by no means a fool. His English is basic but serviceable, and he is able to use it well enough to save his own life by assuming a false stupidity when he is surprised by Caldwell's party. He senses Caldwell's contempt, as the Seneca with him do not, just as he sensed Lana's unease and anger at Gil, and he plays to it, not merely to escape, but to warn his friends in the settlements. Before the Martins' house

is burned, he will take the peacock feather—why leave it to be burned?—and keep it, and years later change his mind and give it back to Lana, but at no time does he consider taking it thievery. When Sullivan's Expedition comes to invade the Iroquois country, he steals ahead to warn his brothers in the Onondaga castle. The Onondagas have chosen the British side, but Blue Back's loyalty is Forster's; he will sooner betray a cause than a brother. A secondary character, Blue Back is described in flashes of thought and activity, but never explained. He is ultimately a mystery, seemingly mercurial but ultimately consistent and true to a value system incompletely revealed.

Nancy Schuyler is another such enigma, the fictitious sister of the equally slow-witted actual Tory Hon Yost Schuyler. Like him, she knows that things for her are not as they are for most people, and like her brother, her response to feeling is physical and immediate. One of her brother's companions meets her in the night and has his way with the affection-starved girl. Her pregnancy drives her mistress, Mrs. Demooth, into a sadistic rage, terrifying the simple girl with threats of abuse and worse. Nancy flees into the woods to join her brother at Niagara. But she meets instead a Seneca, himself something of an outcast, a failed hunter who can not attract a wife from his own people. He takes Nancy instead, and when her brother finds her in a Seneca village with her children, white and Iroquois, she refuses his offer of "rescue", having finally found a place where she fits.

There are other such characters in the secondary rank, who from time to time assume chapter status. The Martins are still the focus, but the people around them become the texture of their lives as much as the forest and the cleared fields. Gil serves in the militia throughout the war, sometimes as a ranger, lower case: a scout in the woods that he knows. Once he is given briefly the rank of Sergeant, mainly to give stability to a patrol of self-styled "timber beasts," single men not fully reconciled to civilization, but otherwise he is one of the

ranks. Immediate danger aside, his only thought is of when he can go back to his farm. Lana hardly dares even think of such a time, having had her hopes so cruelly dashed so often. They seem to be working out a nightmare, dimly aware that they will awaken, but not waking.

Edmonds seems to internalize the war in the Mohawk Valley in them. Frederic, Chambers and Roberts treat the war as a bloody romance, with opportunities for love and advancement amid the fighting. For Edmonds it is akin to a cancer, slowly sapping the life of the place: endless dread punctuated by sudden horror, lightened only by the charity and endurance of the fellow sufferers. By the novel's last third, that suffering mass becomes the hero. Some bear their suffering with more grace than others do, but all are allotted their share of humanity and respect.

Those who inflict the suffering are in another class. The forbearance extended to the fearful, the weak and the broken is not granted to the powerful and ambitious. That cold eye views the meeting between Nickolas Herkimer and Joseph Brant at Unadilla: Cincinnatus meets Caesar. In every aspect of appearance and manner, Brant surpasses Herkimer.

He had a great dignity of behavior, too, that made the militia look like simple men, but it was not that natural dignity of a plain Indian. It had the manner of a white man who has been to a royal court. It was filled with pride, which even so meaching-minded a man as Christian Reall could see was an unnatural thing.

Joe Boleo, watching his back, grunted to George Weaver, "Brant used to be a nice lad, too. But now he wants the world to know he's a nice man."

Joe Boleo had put his finger on Brant's weakness. He wanted to be admired, by both Indians and whites, gentlemen and farmers. He wanted to be a great man, by both standards, with whatever person he was at the moment engaged. It was an attitude that later would account for his irrational kindnesses and friendships, as well as his cruelties and hates. The mistake he always made was his utter inability to understand that forthright people like Boleo or Herkimer or Gil could see straight through him. Vainer people, he enraged.<sup>270</sup>

Brant's attested mercies, like his rescue of Katy Shankland at Cherry Valley, are indeed

“irrational” if one reflects that a genuinely merciful man would not have led a raiding party there in the first place. Brant could have been a voice for neutrality, which is all that the Valley men, personified by the reluctant brigadier Herkimer, are asking for. Instead, he chooses to gamble, with their lives as stakes, as well as the fate of his own people, in a game for political supremacy, and loses all. The Iroquois had anxiety in 1776, but not yet a grievance. Gil’s farm at Deerfield marks the westernmost advance of white settlement, fifteen miles east of the boundary set to Iroquois land at Fort Stanwix in 1763.

Later Edmonds returns to Brant. He is the main leader of the small parties of raiders in the late period of 1780 and 1781, always seen proudly standing apart from his people, but in increasingly bedraggled finery: gold lace unraveling from a tricorne, a draped dirt-hemmed blanket, like a parody of the poses he adopted in his portraits. It is not the traditional image of Brant that has come down, unchanged, from Stone, but it is wholly consistent with Edmonds’ views on Great Men. It is their egoism, a type of stupidity, which makes them want to rise, unbidden, from the mass of men, which keeps them from seeing themselves as others do. Edmonds’ whole judgment of great men is based upon their utility in society. He disliked Kenneth Roberts’ heroic assessment of Benedict Arnold in *Rabble in Arms*, long before the evidence of Arnold’s greed and ambition was published. As he described Arnold’s historical appearance in the Valley after Oriskany

. . . the temptation to present him in an unfavorable light was almost insuperable. But to the people in the Mohawk Valley he would have seemed merely another Continental officer, and that was the only way to present him in the book, and I let him come and go without a harsh word. But I didn’t enjoy doing it at all.<sup>271</sup>

When it comes time to show the raid on Cherry Valley, it is through the eyes of the private soldier John Wolff, now one of Butler’s Rangers. It is the experience of a forced march in a cold, wet country and in sleet and snow. He hears distantly of the arguments between his



own captain, Walter Butler, and Joseph Brant. Here Edmonds was depending on the version written by Swiggett, which placed Brant in a spurious position of authority. When the raid begins, Wolff with the Rangers attacks the fort; they soon realize that the Iroquois are not with them.

Just ahead of them Captain Butler raised up on one arm to look back. His face was bitter and hopeless. He said distinctly, "Oh, my God. Brant's taken all the Indians into the town."<sup>272</sup>

The Rangers shelter from the fort's fire behind burning houses, the only warmth they have had for two days. They eat jerky, oblivious, until too late, that better food is burning up in the houses. They spend a day and a night in the cold and start the return to Canada. Though he had followed Swiggett's account, Edmonds could attach nothing heroic to the raid.

Nothing had happened except the destruction of the houses and the murder of twenty-five noncombatants.<sup>273</sup>

*Destruction* and *murder*—from Swift Edmonds learned to call things by their names. Stephen Vincent Benét, in an otherwise laudatory review, noted

But I wish that, before he tackles a new work, he would reread the episode of the Bastion of St. Gervais, from "The Three Musketeers". That may not be great history, but it is great fiction. And a touch of it wouldn't hurt him, when he sits down to write another book.<sup>274</sup>

But it is hard to imagine anyone on the Bastion of St. Gervais witnessing a scene like the one Gil and Joe Boleo did, of a raiding party with some captive women:

Gil looked at the women and Indians. The crowd had given back a little. Now there was a shrill whoop and one of the Indians bent down and straightened up waving a petticoat. All the Indians whooped. Then another bent down and came up with a short gown. In a moment a couple of dozen of them were waving pieces of the women's clothing. Then they all backed away so that the two men on the hill were able to see the three naked bodies of the women lying in the road.

The Indians looked down at them for a while, shaking their clothes at them, until the man in the green coat put a whistle to his mouth and blew a shrill blast. The Indians answered it stragglingly. They left the women.

The women lay where they were, beaten and stupefied, until the

Indians were quite a way off, when one by one they got up slowly. They stood naked looking back at their burning homes, at the Indians, and the three dead men. Then they stampeded for the woods. The Indians sent a few whoops after them, and at each yell the women seemed to buck up in the air and come down running harder. They weren't like women anymore without their clothes. They were like some kind of animal, and they went a great deal faster than they had before.<sup>275</sup>

Later on, Blue Back witnesses the result of a raid by American soldiers on an Iroquois village. He sees fifteen women rounded up as captives, and coming back later, he finds their bodies, most of them stripped. He finds one young woman naked and barely alive, dying of a blow to the head.

He watches the Americans in their camp that night, recognizing men he knows from the valley. He returns home and tells his people of what he has seen. The Oneida consider making a protest about the abuse of women: they know that this will mean revenge raids by the kin of the outraged women in the coming months, but to do so would make Blue Back's scout public. Blue Back, in his lodge, sits with his wife.

She was immensely proud of him; but at the same time she was disturbed by his persistent staring at her. She did not know that he was wondering whether a white man would consider her young enough, or pretty enough. He felt that he no longer comprehended white men.<sup>276</sup>

Edmonds' scale of morality and great men becomes clear. Men who provoke such chaos, like Brant, are worse than those who merely thrive in it, like Arnold. Men who ignore their responsibilities, like the Congress and state government who virtually ignore the suffering in the Mohawk Valley while maintaining a useless garrison at Ft. Stanwix, are little better. Those in the maelstrom, like the majority of the valley residents, white and red, Patriot and Tory, trying to see their way through, distinguish or damn themselves individually by their own response to chaos. The Tory Ranger John Wolff is treated with more sympathy than the taxman from Albany, who bases his high assessments of ravaged Valley property in the

fourth year of border war by using the King's old records.

By this scale Walter Butler is seriously fallen from the heights set for him by legend, Chambers and Swiggett. Even though Edmonds acknowledged Swiggett's "suggestive study,"<sup>277</sup> he was left with the fact of Butler's own actions. Other than the recruiting party which resulted in his capture, and the raid on Cherry Valley, Butler always served under other officers, most frequently his father. Unlike Brant, who chose war, Butler is under orders, and under a primal obligation. This diminishes his responsibility for the ensuing violence; it also diminishes his stature.

His first appearance is seen through the eyes of Nancy Schuyler, looking for her brother. She hears he is at Shoemaker's tavern, recruiting for the Rangers, one of a party led by Ensign Butler, not the old man but the son Walter. She glimpses him at the tavern "... pale, young, and dark-haired . . . addressing the gathering in a high, decisive voice."<sup>278</sup> Nancy doesn't care about that; she's looking for her brother. She meets other Rangers of Butler's party, who gently attempt to molest her, and hears more of Butler's speech—matter from an official letter, followed by his own short exhortation, and a grumble from one of the Rangers about hearing the same speech for two days.

She sees him later, captured by the militia:

It was her first sight of Walter Butler, with his whittled attorney's face, black hair cut short, and black eyes. His mouth reminded her a little of McLonis's, long and thin-lipped, but, unlike McLonis's, tipped with a passion of contempt.<sup>279</sup>

What is striking here is not so much the Ichabod Crane-like appearance, or the language, *whittled, cut, black, thin-lipped*, suggestive of an inner void, but that Butler should appear through the senses of a retarded girl. Nancy's mind works by instinct, and her by-the-way description of a man she is not really interested in, but may need to be wary of, is not the

Shakespearean entrance of an antihero into the story. It is more like a glimpse of a suspect at the scene of a crime. An audience accustomed to the anti-hero of legend, Chambers, Griffith and Swiggett would be disappointed; an audience not so accustomed may understand sooner that this is not an attractive person. Not long afterwards, Butler is court-martialed.

It gave them a strange thrill to see one of the men who had run the valley standing up before an officer. Butler was self-contained but scornful. He argued in his clear attorney's voice that he had come with a flag to parley with the inhabitants of German Flats. He did not know anything of this new law, he knew only the King's law. He did not consider it necessary to report to Colonel Weston, for he did not know of any Colonel Weston or of any Fort Dayton. The natural pallor of his face was not accentuated when he was brought back into court and sentenced to the pain and penalty of death. The new law he had scorned, as administered by Willett and Arnold, had ground him down.<sup>280</sup>

The sentence is a sham; Arnold and Willett are trying to distract the valley folk from the fact of the absence of the militia. Butler's defiance and his sentence are theatre, a diversion.

Butler's defense is another thing. For a little less than half the novel we have been living in a world in which the new law and Colonel Weston and Fort Dayton are realities. Now Butler claims that they are not real; not that they are illegal, or that they do not apply to him, but that they do not exist. He knows full well that the world has changed, but seems to think that by an effort of mind he can will these changes out of existence.

Walter Butler does not reappear until he leads John Wolff to Cherry Valley.

Everyone thinks it is too late in the season for further operations.

Then Walter Butler, young, headstrong, and consumed with his ambition, decided to make a late fall march on Cherry Valley . . . it was late in the year to make a start. He had insufficient supplies for his troops, and he only had two hundred men. But he put it up to them and they answered by offering to start next day.<sup>281</sup>

Butler's force encounters Brant with his five hundred Indians (they were four hundred, and they were not Brant's, but that is Swiggett's error) and they promptly argue, deep behind

enemy lines. We have seen this before; Herkimer and his colonels argued before Oriskany, with disastrous results. Butler thinks he can assert authority among Iroquois by simply showing them his orders. He makes no attempt to convince or placate Brant; he must have been the worst lawyer in Albany. The force moves on, driven by “. . . the indomitable nervous figure of Butler ahead of them.”<sup>282</sup> That may be Edmonds’ wary acceptance of Swiggett’s biography: *indomitable* is Swiggett and *nervous* is Edmonds’ emendation. The Iroquois are tired and do not like the odds, and the Rangers are being worn down by the cold and wet.

But Butler was stubbornly setting his heart on Cherry Valley; his winter in prison seemed to have given him a bitter power. He drove the Indians on; even Brant, wrapped in his blanket, his gold-lace hat a sodden scarecrow mockery of himself, no longer argued.<sup>283</sup>

Butler is not the only *nervous* man on the trail; his rangers suspect the Iroquois: a white scalp brings eight dollars at Niagara, no questions asked. Again, Butler is shown as having a problem with the exact nature of reality. Indomitability is commonly seen as a heroic trait, but Edmonds qualifies it with *nervous*, making it sound like a mental disorder. Butler refuses to acknowledge the violent instability of the Iroquois, and refuses to consider calling off the attack in the face of that and the harsh weather. The result of that nervous indomitability is a failed attack and needless death.

The men who offered to march with Butler now have second thoughts.

It’s freezing. I hope to God my shoes hold out . . . We’ll be lucky if half this army gets back to Niagara.<sup>284</sup>

The raid starts and the massacre starts. Intent on attacking the fort, Butler sees too late what has started. “His face was bitter and hopeless . . . Butler was traversing the road like a madman. He gathered up an old man and his daughter and sent them into the fort with a flag and passed them in.” Brant warns Butler that the Seneca want more prisoners, and that

they might turn violently on the Rangers who thwart them. "His face was expressionless, his voice as casual as if he talked of driving rabbits."<sup>285</sup> The force leaves Cherry Valley the next day, as divided as before.

Butler does not appear again until very near the end of the novel. The militia is supplied with another officer from Albany, Marinus Willett, sent to organize the defense of the Valley for the fifth year of war. Unlike most other outsiders, Willet looks at the Valley men and sees them as they are and not as what he wishes they were. This Edmonds respects, and Willet is depicted as an honest and realistic soldier. He directs the militia in their defense of the Valley against the last raid of the season. He correctly estimates the probable route of the raiders and places the militia to check them decisively. The raiders retreat into the woods during a heavy snowfall; the scouts following them see the wolves gather not far off. The scouts see the defeated and dispirited raiders huddled around their fires. One man alone stirs. He prods a few men with the flat of his sword to stand sentry.

His face was haggard. His green and black, stained uniform and leather skullcap on his unclubbed black hair identified him to Joe. He could have picked him off then, and got away safe without trouble, but Willet wanted to hit the army, not Butler.<sup>286</sup>

All that is left of him is report. He tries to rally his men when the militia attacks, is shot off his horse and scalped by one of the Oneidas, who then hurries after the horse. One of the militiamen is killed: John Weaver, a boy at the start of the novel, a neighbor of Gil's, now a grown man newly married. His death is the one that matters.

Butler's story and characterization is incomplete, even less so than Brant's, even though they are the stars of nearly every previous version of the matter of the Mohawk Valley. To Edmonds Brant is an egoist made ridiculous by his pretensions. Butler is even less, a scarecrow with a sneer painted on his face; his ambition is inherited but his contempt

and rage is his own; Edmonds does not even bother to find its root.

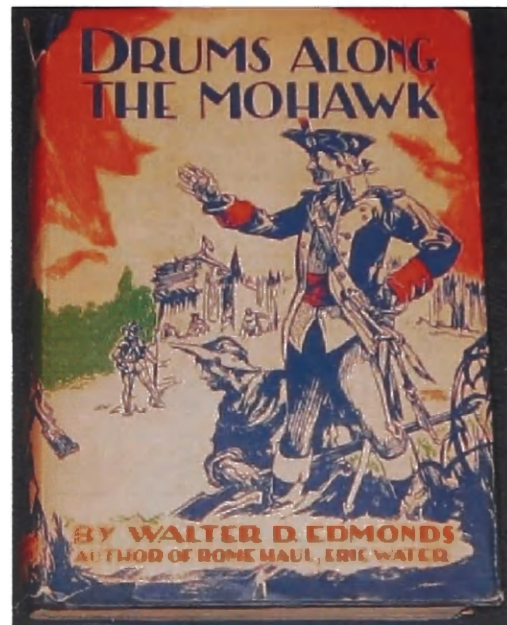
I won't discuss Edmonds with you. He gives me a dreadful pain in the neck, and his stuff is about as bogus as it comes. West had a series of new titles that he thought I ought to consider for Northwest Passage. These are DRUMS, DRUMS ON A RAFT, DRUMS ALONG THE CONNECTICUT, DRUMS BEFORE TICONDEROGA, DRUMS BEFORE BREAKFAST, DRUMS BE DAMNED and DRUMMING WITH ROGERS. His idea is that an historical novel, to be successful, must have the word Drums in its title. Maybe so: I don't know; all I know is that Edmonds bores me deeply.—Kenneth Roberts <sup>287</sup>

Kenneth Roberts' contempt for Edmonds, or perhaps his alarm, may obscure a good point.

The implication of the title *Drums Along the Mohawk* is of savage Indian drums, yet not a one is heard. The most dramatic drums are those of Sullivan's Expedition, entering the Valley in 1779; Gil hears them as he clears a field and thinks that his head is buzzing.<sup>288</sup> The truly sinister sound is that of a silver whistle. Caldwell blows one to summon his men when he encounters Blue Back, and thereafter the sound of a silver whistle always precedes a raid.

Clichéd or not, it was better than his working title, *The Starving Wilderness*; his publishers convinced Edmonds that "... in the Depression that wasn't a happy title at all."<sup>289</sup>

It is unlikely that he had anything to do with the cover. The artist was Henry C. Pitz, a prolific jacket illustrator. He drew a stalwart Continental officer giving direction to armed rustics, personified by the man crouching at his booted feet.





The man is raggedly dressed, his hat torn, his hair dressed with a German comb, his face worn with anxiety and fatigue. Ignore the Leyendecker shirt model posturing above him, for he is the personification of the Valley militiaman.

Being selected as August 1936's Book of the Month helped sales as much as its serialization in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1936 it was the fourth best-selling book in the United States; in 1937, the fifth. The first rank in both years was held by *Gone With the Wind*, and in 1937 the second was *Northwest Passage*; *Drums* dropped to fifth in 1938, but Mr. Roberts' dyspepsia was held at bay for a few months at least.<sup>290</sup>

The money reviews—laudatory reviews in prominent popular journals—praised the storytelling and the “worthiness” of the narrative. No degenerate modern heroes, but the weaving of the American fabric, and an epic story not devoted to getting and spending like so many other books on the bestseller list, starting with #1, but to the survival of American values in the face of hard times.

Its lasting artistic merit was more debatable. The reviewer for the *Times* of London noted that it was “vivid and readable” but that “it is less easy to regard it, however, as an especially notable novel.” Benét's complaint has already been noted. John Hyde Preston in *The New Republic*, who had written his own popular history of the Revolution not long before, had even deeper reservations: “. . . far too long, padded with pointless and stuffy dialogue, and in general has an atmosphere of unreality well documented. . . Of the tragic dilemma of the Indian in those days there is not a ray of understanding.” Perhaps he reached



deadline before he reached page 463; it is a brief review.<sup>291</sup>

More interesting are the reservations of Allan Nevins:

Mr. Edmonds is not a born novelist. He cannot create clearly individualized characters who dominate a book and walk away with its action and the reader's emotions. But he can do very well in painting a society full of people. . . . Most readers will wish that Mr. Edmonds had stuck a little more closely to his hero and heroine; had popularized the story about them, as he had promised to do in his first half-dozen chapters, and thus given it more unity and richer emotional values. But to do that would doubtless have lessened the panoramic quality, and detracted from the impressionistic presentation of an entire valley full of troubled, angry, determined folk. Mr. Edmonds is without any great creative faculty. But he does have a remarkable gift for painting a region, a time, and a body of people inhabiting both.<sup>292</sup>

The reviews themselves have a *panoramic quality*, ranging from the superficial praise of the middlebrow media, to the superficial criticism of the leftist media, to Nevins' mixed judgment as historian and as aesthete: fine history, not so fine art. Nevins recalls Harold Frederic's "veracious and spirited book 'In the Valley'" as worthy of notice and comparison. It is fruitless to speculate on Nevins' ideal of a historical novel, and on Edmonds' feelings upon reading that he was ". . . without any great creative faculty." Nevins does seem to have realized that Edmonds' object was to paint a portrait from life and not imagination. Fifty years later, Edward Countryman would come to the same conclusion:

Although far from great literature, the novel suggests that the Revolution was a tangled, complex affair whose causes and consequences lay as much in American society as in that dispute about British taxation.<sup>293</sup>

Edmonds wrote a novel that combined hard research into the dynamics of a historic social crisis with a form that opened that research to a mass public.<sup>294</sup>

Nevins and Countryman agree, without unduly exciting the contempt of the English department. Their teaching burden has been lightened by Walter Edmonds—Professor Nevins more so than Professor Countryman, since *Drums Along the Mohawk*, while a major best seller through the early forties, gradually lost its place in American popular culture. It

remained in print for more than fifty years, and Edmonds noted his mild disappointment during an interview that Little, Brown had not acknowledged that fact to him with so much as a postcard. When it finally went out of print in 1996 Syracuse University Press brought it out in a quality trade paperback, in print to this day.<sup>295</sup>

But I am not sure that the critics aren't right and that my books are neither novels nor the kind of formal history we were taught at school

It might be better to call them chronicles of the life and times of the ordinary citizens through two hundred-odd years, and the growth and change of their section of Central New York.—Walter Edmonds<sup>296</sup>

Though he had now the complete attention of the reading public, Walter Edmonds never again achieved the popular success of *Drums Along the Mohawk*. The research for it seemed to possess him; soon afterward, he wrote six stories about settlers taken captive by the Iroquois for the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>297</sup> “I wrote them immediately after finishing *Drums Along the Mohawk*, with almost no reference to sources because I was still so saturated with the background of the novel.”<sup>298</sup> With these stories, he made complete his fictional annals of the New York frontier during the Revolution, finally taking the reader on the journey made by Jane Campbell and others into captivity and out, and the uneasy readjustment to the old life. He tried to write about other eventful years—the Anti Masonry furor, the Civil War—in the history of his home region, but found that the days of *smooth sailing* were done.

The Mansion House and its grounds are still as well kept up as they could have been in the early days and as Walter Edmonds' place still is, and that is yet a kind of dream from which one does not want to escape. I talked about this with Constance Robertson, and I said that Walter had written his books mostly out of his boyhood imaginings and that now that he was getting too old for such fantasies he didn't know what to do.—Edmund Wilson, 1958<sup>299</sup>

Wilson once told Edmonds with his usual honesty/rudeness that he found his novels dull.

Edmonds may have tempered that judgment with the knowledge that Wilson envied his local birth and his ready acceptance by the neighborhood. Edmonds came to believe that his

early success had been the worst thing that could have happened to him.<sup>300</sup> He continued writing: histories and award-winning novels about pioneer life for young people, but for the rest of his life he was primarily identified as the author of *Drums Along the Mohawk*<sup>301</sup>. A writer may have a worse epitaph.

However, he did not know that in 1938. As Edmonds saw his novel fall in the ranks of best sellers, he had the tempered consolation that the movie adaptation of *Drums Along the Mohawk* was in the early stages of preparation, and would soon create an agreeable bump in sales. In 1939 Darryl F. Zanuck announced that 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox was going to begin principal photography of their Technicolor production of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, under the direction of John Ford.<sup>302</sup>

*Nothing illustrates the casual, accidental happenstance of the workings of American popular culture than Drums Along the Mohawk. An agreeable young man writes a series of regional tales of history. He begins a new project that gives him more trouble than his previous four novels combined. He persists, and succeeds by abandoning craft and simply immersing himself in primary sources and writing the story they tell him. The troublesome novel is the most successful of his career, and one of the most successful best sellers of the decade.*

*The imbalance gradually introduced over 50 years by Frederic, Chambers and Griffith is made right by Edmonds' accurate perception of the forces at work on the New York Revolutionary frontier, and made vivid by his dramatic characterizations. The success of his novel ensures that his correct depiction is the defining vision of that frontier in the popular culture—thousands of copies remain extant in numerous editions, and the novel is still in print, long after his predecessors' works have disappeared from the shelves, their own careers little more than footnotes.*

*Yet the culture did not right itself. Edmonds' intervention was purely personal and came close to being stillborn. His motivation was the storyteller's instinct that a good story was untold, and that he could*

*tell it. He did not set out to correct the incorrect perspective given to the story by Frederic, Chambers and Griffith. He rejected Swiggett's hero building. He came to the objective judgment through experiment that the best story to tell was the epic of the enduring farmers, and not their betters.*

*The main influence traceable to Chambers is a negative one. Edmonds said that he discarded an early draft because of its resemblance to the sort of romance that Chambers wrote, but his treatment of the material in his published work seems to be a conscious rejection of the romances and characterizations employed by Chambers, particularly in his drab, anti-heroic depiction of Walter Butler. Yet Butler is human, and a less ambitious Loyalist like John Wolff are even more human and understandable, and more heroic than the two profiles pasted together that comprise Butler's usual depiction.*

*Joseph Brant is introduced in all his pride, and ebbs like Butler until his last glimpse is as a man in a damp hat with ragged gold lace. Edmonds prefers the ordinary man, Blue Back. He shows the war destroy the old amity between the settlers and the Iroquois, and shows the white men behaving savagely in Iroquois lands. Edmonds added to this with his captive stories. Like Jane Campbell's account, these stories show the recorded spectrum of the captive experience: cruelty, kindness, misunderstanding and wary acceptance of the Other. Taken with the main account of the settlers and their survival, Edmonds restores the balance of the three strands of the original story.*

*All this was done by an amateur untrained in any historical discipline, whose scholarship excited the respect of historians high in the profession then and now. Edmonds does not call himself a crusader, or valiant-for-truth; he calls himself a workman, striving to do his job well, a storyteller trying to convey his tale honestly. Yet despite Edmonds' careful effort to restore an honest view of the frontier war, the melodramatic imbalance would return to the story a few years later—ironically, thanks to the success of his book.*

## Chapter 12: John Ford: *Drums Along the Mohawk*, 1939

*After nearly fifty years of dialectic over the meaning of the events that occurred in Cherry Valley and the Mohawk Valley during the American Revolution, an informal synthesis had been reached. Through the arguments of Frederic, Chambers, Swiggett and Edmonds, and the criticism and derivative works they had excited, it was possible for a culturally alert person to judge their value and conclude their meaning.*

*It seems clear that the meaning would be the one arrived at by Walter D. Edmonds—the military and moral victories achieved by the people of the communities of the Mohawk Valley against governments using them as pawns in a war of great powers, even if one of them was a government that claimed to be their own. Individuals, not governments, exerted their own independence and the power to make their own fates—in Edwards' phrase, the knowledge that finally, a man must stand up; in Jane Campbell's response to Governor Clinton's remark on her sons' future as soldiers, "I hope my country will never need their services."*

*However critics might disagree about the place of *Drums Along the Mohawk* in the high- or middle-brow arts, the accuracy of the historical and social setting was not disputed. If it was not a great novel, it was a great historical novel; a true picture of a bygone age. That portrait was now in the hands of a major motion picture studio, whose most gifted director of American themes was tasked with bringing it to the screen.*

*The story now is the story of how a historical novel was translated to the screen, and how much of what made it distinctive and honest was lost in the process.*

A culturally alert person in 1939, who learned that *Drums Along the Mohawk* was to be made into a picture, would have thought that the director most suited to such a theme was John Ford.

At this point, the past tense no longer pertains. John Ford *is* the greatest director in American film. In his own lifetime, such masters of world and American cinema as Bergman, Kurosawa, Welles, Capra and Hawks described Ford as the greatest of living

directors. In the 36 years since his death, and the deaths of his peers, his critical standing has risen and fallen within that pantheon, but no directors have emerged to surpass their stature, and presumably, their judgment. No one would argue that anyone has emerged in the American cinema to surpass those American directors who called Ford their master.<sup>303</sup>

Ford himself would have acknowledged D.W. Griffith, but Griffith is more properly an innovator of film narrative. His critical reputation has never recovered from the burden of his most famous film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Its ingrained racism is still as rabid and as repugnant on the most recent viewing as on the first. One of Ford's last features, *Sergeant Rutledge*, used some of the same imagery as Griffith used, to subvert that racism. What elevates Ford past Griffith is Ford's awareness that his ideas and imagery have consequences further and deeper than a mere 'show'. As his career progressed, his work displays an awareness of the American national story, the American myth: the story of what Americans have done as a nation to become a nation. As it progressed into the late 1940's and into the 1950's, his work increasingly became the story of what Americans had given up to become that nation.

Two of his major works, *Fort Apache* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, have codas involving implicit or explicit suppression of the truth to permit belief in a comfortable, spurious legend. At the end of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a newspaperman says the line most often quoted from a Ford picture: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Often overlooked is that it comes at the end of a picture devoted to the ruthless deconstruction of that same legend. The tone for much of what is best in the modern American cinema—the unwillingness to settle for the surface reality, the re-examination of the American national story—was set and legitimized by Ford's mature work

His only serious rival for the title is Orson Welles, who said that his models as a new

director were the old masters: John Ford, John Ford, and John Ford. He is quoted just as often describing his preparation for shooting *Citizen Kane*: repeated viewings of Ford's *Stagecoach*; the figure most often cited being forty. This may be true, but the reference is incomplete; Wells did not watch it alone. At each viewing he was in the company of a particular film technician or craftsman, to whom he directed questions about certain technical details or effects; how they were done or how they could be bettered.<sup>304</sup> The choice of picture was probably arbitrary; *Stagecoach* was recent and a copy was available. The choice of director was not.

By 1939 Ford's technical mastery of film and film storytelling was a given in the industry and among critics. Welles was making an American film and he wanted to see the standard expected of an American master, and in 1939 Ford had begun a period of creativity unequalled by any other director before or since. *Stagecoach*, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, *Drums Along The Mohawk*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Long Voyage Home*, *Tobacco Road*, *How Green Was My Valley*—8 pictures in three years; four of them permanent members of the canon of American film.

Little of his work in the preceding years prepares the viewer for the maturity of this onrush. Ford might go from gangster comedies like *The Whole Town's Talking* to the poetic *The Informer* to the sentimental Americana of *Steamboat Round the Bend* and *Judge Priest* to the melodrama of *The Prisoner of Shark Island* to the stagy prestige of Maxwell Anderson's *Mary of Scotland*. The results could vary. Ford was hectoring Thomas Mitchell, a New York actor still new to the pictures, on the set of *Stagecoach*; Mitchell silenced him by saying "That's all right Mr. Ford. I've seen *Mary of Scotland*".<sup>305</sup>

In 1939 Ford's career began to assume the direction it would take until its end. The pictures of the 1939-1941 years were the establishing works of Ford's vision of the American

national story. Set in the past, some of it quite recent, they were an outline for the mosaic that told the story of how the modern cultural consensus came to be. All but one were set in one of the cultural homelands, and the exception, *How Green Was My Valley*, was a cultural prehistory: the destruction of an organic, traditional society, a Welsh mining family and their community, by economic forces that left no alternative but emigration, with memory the only solace.

It was also Ford's most autobiographical picture—the story of the youngest member of a large family. His career in Hollywood began the way most things did in his early years; he had followed an older brother. His brother Francis had left home in Maine to go to Hollywood, and made a modest success as a producer-director. John joined him, struck out on his own soon afterwards and began to surpass him. Like most directors in Hollywood in 1925 he made westerns and unlike most he made a big one, *The Iron Horse*, an epic of the Union Pacific. Though many of his early westerns contain glimpses of his later career, *The Iron Horse* was the first to transcend the merely western action genre for the national story which became the hallmark of most of his finest work. The railroad is the dream of one man, but the work of many, and Ford shows that the many have their own dreams and their own ambitions. The way those individual stories are woven together is the vision Ford brought to the screen. There is no character that may not emerge from the mass as an individual, if only for a vignette, like Griffith's sentry watching Lillian Gish.<sup>306</sup>

There were many heirs to Griffith's humanism, but Ford combined this with a more adult understanding of history and culture. The simplistic adventure tales of his early work mature into more complex stories of historical necessity combined with a growing sense that with progress, as much is lost as is gained. By the end of his career the price of progress seemed to be almost unbearable.



Only in retrospect does Ford's increasing maturity seem inevitable, and his earlier pictures are cherry-picked for the evidence. The three pictures he made in the 30's with Will Rogers are emblems of Americana, but they are interspersed among the three he made about the British Empire, and the two he made about the Irish Rebellion. The truth is that Ford's career in the 30's was that of a Hollywood professional, expected to work to the material provided by the studio and its producers. Ford could assert his independence by making a superior argument, convincing his bosses that his way was right. He had also learned devious methods; the most celebrated was his "editing in the camera": shooting only enough footage to allow a picture to be assembled in only one way. But even this was only one more argument. A strong willed producer could still have his own way by cutting even more footage, or shooting additional scenes.

In Ford's case, that producer was often Darryl F. Zanuck. He was Ford's boss on five of the eight pictures of 1939-1941. His most famous intervention was on *The Grapes of Wrath* in which he re-wrote and re-shot the entire last sequence. Ford's movie ended with Tom Joad taking leave of his mother, a criminal and a fugitive, defiant and unbowed. Zanuck added the coda of Ma Joad's hopeful speech about the ultimate victory of the people. Ford declined the opportunity to shoot it, having no other way to show his disapproval.<sup>307</sup>

A lesser known but more telling intervention occurred six years later. In 1941 John Ford went on active service in the Navy. He spent four years in various duties, sometimes under fire, and was wounded while filming the Battle of Midway. By the time he returned to Hollywood he had served longer than any of his contemporaries. He was also the most honored of working directors, with four Oscars, among other critical awards. He went back to work for Zanuck, making *My Darling Clementine*, a mythic re-telling of the Wyatt Earp

story. A major plot thread is Earp's growing love for the woman who loves his friend Doc Holliday. In one scene he watches them working together as doctor and nurse; he sees her respect and devotion, and knows that his own feelings are hopeless. Ford showed Henry

Fonda, as Earp watching the two, *in silhouette*—the front of his face and hat a dark void. He turns aside, looking down, still visible only in outline. Ford seemed to believe that the audience could supply Fonda's expression of loss as well as Fonda could, and doing so



themselves, have ownership of that feeling, and empathy for the man who feels it. It was the judgment of a master. Zanuck cut it.<sup>308</sup>

The following year Ford became his own producer. Though he would continue to work for the major studios, for the rest of his life all of his major works were produced by his own company. Despite his ability and his stature in the profession, the only way he could place his vision on the screen completely was to be his own producer.

John Ford, John Ford and John Ford—the talented studio hand, the top hand, the master of his professional fate; one must be careful of one's chronology when ascribing the control over a picture to John Ford. *Mary of Scotland* was what the studio gave him to do, based upon an esteemed play of the time. Such filmed plays were expected to reach the screen with the original stars and as much of the play as possible, and as much of the staging as well. Expectations were high and not to be denied, no matter how inappropriately stage conventions translated to the screen. Four years later he and the same screenwriter, Dudley Nichols, would shape together four half-forgotten one-act plays by Eugene O'Neill, with a cast of featured players, and proscenium staging replaced by Gregg Toland's

cinematography, into *The Long Voyage Home*. It was nominated for five Oscars and won none. In their stead Ford got a telegram from O'Neill: "It is a great picture and I hope you are as proud of it as I am."<sup>309</sup>

Similarly, given the bestselling novel *How Green Was My Valley* to direct, Ford had something of a free hand to whip a vast unwieldy narrative into a two hour picture. Worse still, the main character was a boy who takes 400 pages to reach maturity. With no star parts, featured players filled the cast, and the lead was "a gangly-looking, strange-looking kid," screenwriter Philip Dunne's first impression of the unknown Roddy McDowell, ". . . the real auteur of the picture." Rewriting the story to focus solely on the hero's boyhood, Dunne's script won the enthusiastic support of Zanuck. Ford's own spin on the script was the point of view of the youngest child in a big, vital family; his own emotional autobiography.<sup>310</sup>

By ". . . the real auteur of the picture" Dunne refers to the theory advanced in the 1950's by French and American film theorists: that every great film has an *author*, usually the director, who places a distinctive stamp on the entire film. It is a controversial theory, even fifty years later. Film is the most collaborative of artistic efforts. Hundreds of people play a role in the production of a film. Yet it is undeniable that the films of a great director show common characteristics throughout his career, and that a great director, allowed to work unhampered by the studio, usually creates a picture of lasting worth.

Dunne argued that the finished film of *How Green Was My Valley* owed a great deal to McDowell's talent and presence, which allowed Ford to create a more personal, intimate story instead of the studio's original, more conventional trouble-at-the-mill epic. It also saved the studio a bundle; the picture no longer needed an adult star to play the grown hero; Tyrone Power had been tentatively cast. Luck, (the casting of McDowell); economy, (the money saved by that casting) and vision, (Dunne's adaptation of the novel as the story of a

boy and Ford personalizing it into his own story) made *How Green Was My Valley* an example of the Hollywood system working at its best: a popular entertainment that earned profits and lasting artistic accolades. It did not always work that way.

There are three candidates for *auteur* of the film of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and the film's problem is that Ford is the last of them. Zanuck bought the book. He would have known even before the check was cut that the nearly 600 pages of the novel contained too much story for a 115 minute film. The rule of thumb for screenplays is that one page of script equals a minute of film, and by page 120 of *Drums Along the Mohawk* the Martins' homestead hasn't even been burnt. Zanuck decided almost at once that the script would be limited to the personal story of the Martins. All other characters, and all of the history, would be cut unless they had a direct effect on Gil and Lana. This heavy focus on two individuals in a historical maelstrom left little time for Edmonds' gradual character development. There was not enough time to create the gradual disintegration of the Martins' marriage and its slow reintegration; the audience would need an instant marker of a simple cause for the Martins' marital conflict.

Zanuck's take on the main story was *fish out of water*: the farmer takes a city wife—a stock situation, readily understood, with the added fillip that the farmer was poor and his wife was not. With this guidance the screenwriters began to craft an adaptation. Bess Meredith's treatment of January 1937 was faulted for, among other problems, retaining too many of the novel's characters and excessive characterization of same. Zanuck had it rewritten by, among others, William Faulkner, who tried to clarify the plot, Sonya Levein, who specialized in women's character and dialogue, and Lamar Trotti, who tried to shape and polish the various efforts into a shooting script. One of Zanuck's assistants summarized the process thusly:

We must not let ourselves be bound by the contents of the book—but simply retain the *spirit* of the book. We must concentrate our drama, tighten what plot we have and make it more forceful—so that we build and build to a big sustaining sock climax where we let everything go with a bang. So long as we capture the general line, the characters, the period—we can and should forget the book. Mr. Zanuck could not be emphatic enough in bringing home the fact that we are in the business to *Give A Show*—that our first job is to *Make Entertainment*.

It may sound like satire, but that is from an eleven-page record of one of Zanuck's story conferences. There is nothing to indicate that he would have said anything different about *The Long Voyage Home* had he produced it. Earlier he likened the picture's basic plot to that of *The Good Earth*, a big moneymaker of 1937: country boy weds city girl and puts her on the farm; they struggle and then the locusts come. Substitute the Iroquois for the locusts and you have a show.<sup>311</sup>

One thing notable in Zanuck's pre-production are the women involved in the earliest stages. The major scriptwriting tasks were assigned to women; Meredith and Levein worked on the major adaptive tasks, while Faulkner and Trotti edited and polished their work. Levein's presence may be the first sign of the dominant feminine slant that the picture was to take. A dramatic view of the diminished plot does not leave Gilbert Martin with very much heroic stature. Edmonds' Gil does not rise in rank or perform cinematic heroic deeds—indeed, for the movie, Adam Hartman's run would be appropriated for him—he endures and endures and endures, but it would take a long time for the movies to see the heroism in that. Lana is no more heroic, or less, but her passive courage and growing strength in the course of the story make more of a dramatic arc. Her need to change and grow as described in Zanuck's radical recasting of her character gave her the dramatic focus. Having elevated Lana's place in the story, he then cast the role.

In 1939 Claudette Colbert was exactly twice the age of Lana Martin at the beginning

of the novel, but that was not the problem. Lana had been recast as a city girl, but the only cities that readily come to mind in connection with Colbert are midtown Manhattan, and anywhere in Paris. In the picture, General Herkimer, meeting her at the muster, pronounces her *hübsch*—possibly the nearest word in German to *soigné*.

The old joke goes that Spencer Tracy is told that the critics complained that no matter the part, he always plays Spencer Tracy. “Who do they want me to play” he grumbles, “*Humphrey Bogart?*” He may have said it, but few know why any more. Until 1959, most moviegoers went to the theatre when it was convenient for them, and most movies ran continuously. It was Alfred Hitchcock who commanded theatre managers to allow no one into *Psycho* after the opening credits ended. For the most part they obeyed him and patrons obeyed them, and thus began the custom of movie audiences seeing a picture from start to finish. Until this time, moviegoers could walk into the middle of a movie and see an actor playing to type.<sup>312</sup>

You could expect Spencer Tracy to play Spencer Tracy, to play his *type*, and for other stars to play theirs. Someone coming into a theatre could look up and see Spencer Tracy and know that he was good, brave and honest, or Clark Gable and know that he was not so good, just as brave, and a devil with women. Types were often tested, but they always came out true by the last reel.

The casting of *Drums Along the Mohawk* followed these types. Colbert projected refined city dweller even in frontier crinolines. Henry Fonda, cast as Gil, projected natural American integrity; and he had starred in the film adaptation of Edmonds’ first novel *Rome Haul*, the 1936 release *The Farmer Takes a Wife*. That his surname was an old Mohawk Valley family name did not hurt—together with a quiet masculine elegance that suited the hero of a picture about a heroine; it was still 1939 and Colbert had top billing. The rest of the cast

were character actors, all playing in their own types; there was no one threatening the primacy of the male and female lead.

Colbert was a fine and willing actress, but the frontier was not her métier. To make it so required the efforts of the picture's second auteur. It was a mark of the prestige attached to *Drums Along the Mohawk* that it was one of only seven Technicolor releases by 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox in 1939.<sup>313</sup> It was also Ford's first color picture; he would not make another until 1948. Today his color work has little to differentiate it from his work in black and white. Though he did not always work with masters at the level of Gregg Toland, nearly all of his work is characterized by the apparent inability to expose an ugly frame of film. In 1949 on location, filming in Technicolor *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, Ford told his cameraman to shoot a long action sequence during the uneven light of an approaching lightning storm. It was shot under written protest, and its beautifully varied light made it the most famous scene in the picture.<sup>314</sup> Ford's company produced the picture and the crew worked for him, but even so they still had a professional reputation to maintain, and any association with a waste of expensive color stock could bar a man from important pictures.

Technicolor was handled with kid gloves, and the person wearing them in 1939 was usually a woman named Natalie Kalmus. The wife of the developer of the Technicolor process, she took a possessive role in protecting the value of the family product. To her, that meant strictly regulating its use. She developed a guideline called the "Law of Emphasis" for the proper use of Technicolor and the Technicolor-approved cameramen were expected to follow it closely.<sup>315</sup> The director who wanted to follow his own vision could expect a disagreement and an intervention by Kalmus.

Rouben Mamoulian had filmed the first Technicolor feature, *Becky Sharp* in 1935, which success had demonstrated its strong appeal; thereafter he was trusted with the process

and allowed to innovate. His *Blood and Sand* is commonly cited as a model use of early Technicolor, but it is an exception. His palette was borrowed from great Spanish artists like El Greco and Goya, with great dark spaces on the screen. The routine use of Technicolor was more commonplace. *Gone With the Wind* is the true exemplar for this time, with balanced, “tasteful” compositions designed to please the eye rather than excite it.

John Ford had never shot a color frame before. His cameraman for *Drums Along the Mohawk* was Bert Glennon, who had worked for him on his last two pictures, *Stagecoach* and *Young Mr. Lincoln*. On the evidence of these pictures alone, they needed little help, but they got it in the form of Technicolor specialist Ray Rennahan, who had worked with Mamoulian on *Becky Sharp* and who would work with him again on *Blood and Sand*. The rest of his work is relatively undistinguished, and he ended up in television; his best-known pictures were directed invariably by men with a strong visual sense, like Ford and Mamoulian. Rennahan worked for Kalmus.

Kalmus’ Law of Emphasis was meant to incorporate Technicolor unobtrusively as another element of the picture, a visual enhancement of the story and not an end to itself. This is correct, but inevitably there would be a disagreement on how and where to emphasize the color. Kalmus chose to set limits on the director’s own visual sense. Five years after Ford made *Drums Along the Mohawk*, Vincente Minnelli would set down his own disagreements with Kalmus, protesting that he had made his reputation on Broadway through his innovative use of color. At that time, one theatrical reviewer suggested that theatergoers “. . . utter a fervent plea to the deities of the theatre that the bogeymen of Technicolor don’t get him (Minnelli) for a while at least.” It may have been the standard, futile wish against the siren call of Hollywood, or a protest against the homogenized, tasteful tones of Technicolor as opposed to Minnelli’s vivid color sense. In either case, Technicolor was



becoming a dirty word to the cognoscenti.<sup>316</sup>

Two of Kalmus' rules especially affected Ford's work. *Eliminate distracting focal points*; avoiding "unnecessary busyness," avoiding "a clutter of color and detail." The two terms in quotes were almost a hallmark of Ford's style. His shots had the "unnecessary busyness" of real life. He tried to create a world behind whoever was emoting at the moment, to set them in their context of community. The "clutter of color and detail" is Ford's way of making a place seem lived in. Every chair is where the last person to sit in it left it, and carries the impression of him. You look at a room in a Ford picture and you always know where the mother sits.

Another of Kalmus' rules was *the female lead has primacy in color planning*. "[Her] appearance is of primary concern [and] must be given undisputed priority . . . if her complexion limits the colors she can wear successfully, this in turn restricts the background colors." This meant that the choice of Colbert for the female lead meant that the color palette would be designed around her, rather than designed to convey the reality of frontier life or the director's need to use color for effect.

Long afterwards, Ford gave his own opinion of color:

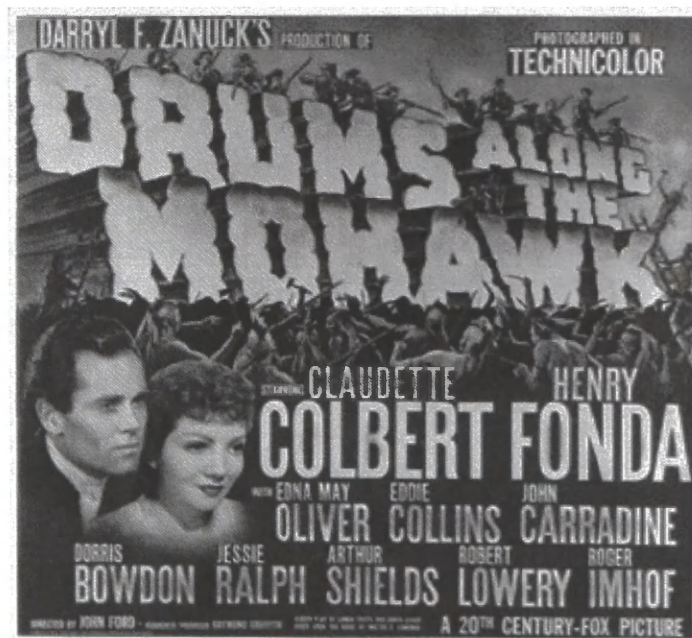
It's much easier than black and white for the cameraman; it's a cinch to work in, if you've any eye at all for color and composition. But black and white is pretty tough—you've got to know your job and be very careful to lay your shadows properly and get the perspective right. In color—there it is, but it can go awfully wrong and throw a picture off. . . . For a good dramatic story, though, I much prefer to work in black and white . . . black and white is real photography.<sup>317</sup>

Years after he had demonstrated a master's eye for color, he still did not trust it. His valedictory picture, his last major work, was 1962's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*; Ford shot it in black and white. A look at the pictures he shot 1939-1941 tells the tale. In *Stagecoach* and *The Grapes of Wrath* the heat and dust of the southwest are palpable, almost on the

tongue. The Mohawk frontier as envisioned by Edmonds is similarly elemental, with the added sensation of cold. After 100 years of photography and 50 years of film the effects of black and white could be precisely gauged to evoke such effects. Color was still being proven, and Ford and others were hampered in their work by a proprietary rule that demanded they put aside everything learned since Caravaggio to focus on Claudette Colbert's complexion.

The match of *Drums Along the Mohawk* and John Ford seemed on paper to be almost providential. Ford, more than any of his contemporaries, had the vision to imagine for the screen a story both epic and personal about the birth and trial of the new American nation. The setting of the story on the frontier, among people despised by the eastern elites, matched his own chosen theme of the open frontier, and his self-perceived outsider status of the-not-quite-an-American son of an Irish immigrant saloonkeeper growing up in downeast Maine.

That he could not bring his own experience and feeling to this story, as he had done and would do in his most successful pictures, was not his fault. Zanuck supervised the adaptation and the casting, and chose to have it filmed in Technicolor. Zanuck's choices designated it as a prestige picture, with much invested in its filming and success.



It would be closely supervised by a producer who had demonstrated that he did indeed think he could make a better picture than his best director. (Note the relative billing in the

newspaper ad.) None of Ford's usual tricks—editing in the camera, altering the script—would work. As well, he was working in an unfamiliar palette, under a tight leash that allowed no experimentation. Given these restraints, it is not surprising that Ford seemed to give in to the demands of reality and make the picture that Zanuck expected him to make.

That said, it is a fine picture. Compared to the other big budget Revolutionary war epic that year, *The Howards of Virginia*, a Chambers-like costumer about some neighbors of Thomas Jefferson, it is a masterpiece. A year later King Vidor would film *Northwest Passage* from Kenneth Roberts' best seller, a story so sprawling that it was cut in half and subtitled *Part One: Rogers' Rangers* with Spencer Tracy in the lead. Vidor was as fine a stylist as Ford at the time, but the picture suffers now from a deeply reactionary view of the Indians—part Roberts and part Hollywood: there are no good Indians, and lots of dead ones. The focus of the movie is Robert Rogers' raid on the Abenaki village of St. Francis; the historical raid was a mixed failure, with heavy losses of Rangers and few Indian casualties, almost none of them warriors in arms, balanced against the dubious claim of so terrorizing the Indians that they would not make any more raids. The picture shows none of this and barely hints at the darker realities about the raid and Rogers himself. Ironically, *Northwest Passage* might not have been made had not *Drums Along the Mohawk* succeeded at the box office the year before.

*Drums Along the Mohawk* succeeds as a picture because the story is tightened—the time scale seems to have been reduced from 5 years to the span of three summers. The characters are simplified and so is the conflict. When Gil and Lana stop at the inn and meet the saturnine John Carradine as Caldwell, he asks them their party. “The *American*



party” says Henry Fonda, and that’s that. He is well dressed and sinister, and as he leaves them, he takes a candle to light his way upstairs, a small naked flame in front of him.

When he appears next, it is in a group of raiders who emerge from the forest mist, almost like the trees of Burnham Wood, to burn the valley. That was how Ford liked to work.

Caldwell is the only Tory; Blue Back is the only speaking Indian. Joseph Brant, Walter Butler and the fictional Tory John Wolff do not appear to confuse the issue with dissenting opinions.



The conflict is Lana against the frontier. It may not have been Ford’s intention to do so; he was not a subversive artist, but Lana against the frontier seems to become Lana against almost the entire cast. Aside from her wedding party, nearly everyone in the picture is a reasonably contented and likable member of the Mohawk Valley community, and the place seems to be as clean and pleasant as any. Standing in for the low, wooded Mohawk Valley lands are the Wasatch Mountains of Utah—unsettled and scenic with clear, piney skylines and Technicolor blue skies. There is little murky or threatening in these woods, and not a black fly in the air.

Per Kalmus, medium blue is the dominant color for Colbert. She almost always wears a medium or dark blue dress. When she joins in the deception of women standing in for men on the walls of the fort, she wears a blue Continental coat—unlikely, given the near total absence of American regulars in the valley—and when she is bed after childbirth, showing Gil his son, the rough wooden door open beside her bed is covered with a coat of blue paint. She wears this color almost exclusively. Even the Continental’s coat is a Navy



blue shade so as not to clash with her.

She stands apart, as the color scheme designed around her only isolates her more. This was Colbert's first color picture. Usually filmed almost exclusively in the silver light of black and white, Colbert does not seem *right* in color; whether she thought this during filming or afterwards—or if she thought it at all—is not known, but she would not make another film in color for fifteen years, until the end of her film career.

Setting aside, as one must, the knowledge of the novel, Colbert's Lana is still incongruous. She is clearly not eighteen, but neither is she too old; she and Fonda are exactly the same age, but she is clearly too old to be lapsing into girlish hysterics. She never did before; her career consisted almost entirely of women afraid of nothing. In the title role of *Cleopatra*, her first scene showed her tied and gagged in a chariot racing across the desert; after the gag comes off, she is spitting defiance at her captors. In *Drums* she seems more like a debutante being expected to rough it in the woods—a recipe for the kind of comedy that made her a star—but here played straight.

Her wedding opens the picture; it is in her family home, which seems to be a corner



wilderness and registers annoyance at the flies and mud.

of the Twelve Oaks set from *Gone with the Wind*, with some of the belles from the same set, but in damask gowns, seeing her off on her wedding journey. She looks out of the wagon timidly at the

Her character never seems to recover from her first moments in her new home. Gil brings her in at night and settles her and goes out to pack. She hears him at the door again and starts talking to him, but it is not Gil.



Standing in the doorway in a jump cut is Blue Back, stark and silent, draped in a blood red robe. She screams; he steps to her and she screams louder. Then Gil comes in and has to slap her to bring her out of her hysteria.

Blue Back says that he “. . . is

good Christian” and leaves. While Gil calms her, Blue back returns with a short stick and advises Gil to “beat her good”. Gil takes the stick and weighs it thoughtfully before placing it on the mantelpiece.

(In the novel, Blue Back’s presence is signaled by the unrest of the animals outside. When he enters, Lana, who has seen Indians before, is not afraid of him but disgusted that he is allowed in the house by Gil. Blue Back speaks simple but clear, unbroken English. He senses Lana’s sulky rudeness and Gil’s mortification, and privately hands Gil a willow switch.)

Like the absence of Tories, the Indian situation is simplified by reducing their numbers to one speaking role, Blue Back, and various grunting extras, the effect of which reduces Blue Back from a representative of an allied tribe pursuing its own interests against other Iroquois to a faithful, almost canine friend of the whites. What adds to the pity is the

fact that the actor playing him, John Big Tree, was in fact a Seneca, whose family claimed that playing a member of whatever tribe he acted as a Hollywood Indian, he always spoke his native tongue, a language not heard anywhere in the movie.<sup>318</sup>

Colbert as Lana may be forgiven her complete breakdown, but it is the strongest early scene her character has, and its shadow falls across the rest of her performance. Soon enough Colbert pulls herself together and becomes a farmer's wife, tested by war and frontier raids. Again the story is *her* experience. Edmonds' careful reconstruction of the horrors of Oriskany is set aside. Lana watches the militia march away. She stands on a hill, watching the long thin column slowly dwindle into the woods to the beat of a single tinny drum, her back to the camera, finally slipping to the ground. It is one of those shots that looks like it was based on a painting until you realize that it was Ford's image, and now part of the national iconography.





When they return after the battle, she goes out into the driving night rain, asking after Gil, watching the wounded men being carried past her. Stragglers come out of the dark, one or a few at a time. Finally a man tells her that after him no one's left alive. On she goes, and Gil comes out of the dark.

In shelter a dazed Gil tells her what happened. Fonda's flat monotone recites small and major events in an impressionistic manner. At one point, he describes a comrade's actions, unaware that the same man is now wrapping a bandage around his head. The relation is as much as a 1939 audience might be told of the battle that Edmunds described in full detail, and less than what they could be shown, and on that basis, the choice may have been a wise one. Still, it is told to Colbert; it is still her story. Fonda is further diminished by the destruction of the farm which he was unable to prevent. He has to find work to get through the winter, and hires himself and Lana to the widow Sarah McKlenner, and the movie finally finds a hero.



Edna Mae Oliver had a corner in the market for sprightly spinsters in Hollywood; she was the only choice for Betsy Trotwood in Selznick's *David Copperfield* and repeated the part with minor variations for the

rest of her career. She was wonderful in that and she is wonderful in this. Technicolor accentuates her ruddy complexion, which dominates anything the color consultants tried to



drape over her busy, angular body. In her first scene, she is draped in a plaid cloak, like a Highland chief. Ford shoots her like a man in love, and gives her some flirtatious business with the local hearty, good for nothing played by Ward Bond.

Oliver has the best scene in the picture. During the final raid on the settlements, two Iroquois invade her house to burn it. She tries to stop them, and then demands that they remove her marriage bed from the burning house. Equally admiring and amused, they comply, dragging the bed and her out into the yard. Again, it is a scene from the novel, this time shot almost as Edmonds wrote it; the Iroquois acting out the emotions he placed in their minds. But it is the kind of scene that Ford liked to use in his own pictures.

The two Seneca appear suddenly in the bedroom, holding torches and jugs of (presumed) spirits. They are in a well-lit and homely room, which only makes their potential for violence worse. To this is added Sarah McKlenner's violent resistance to their attempts to burn the room. The expectation is that she hasn't long to live; their cheerful compliance is the kind of unexpected action that Ford used to give the impression that real life was taking place on the screen.

Oliver's presence and performance further unbalances the film. Her resolute courage emphasizes Colbert's weakness and diminishes Fonda even more. He has lost his farm



and livelihood, his wife is an ornamental weakling, his experience of battle reduced him to shock and now he is a hired man living on the charity of a brave bold woman who seems to fear nothing.

The climax ensues. The settlers escape to the fort and are besieged by the Tories and Iroquois under Caldwell's command. Messengers try to escape and bring help. The Iroquois shoot fire arrows at the wooden walls and even carry up ladders to climb over the walls. Sarah McKlenner, dressed in a soldier's coat and manning the wall with some of the other women, including Lana (in a blue coat, of course), is mortally wounded by an arrow and lives long enough to leave her house and holdings to Gil and Lana.

Gil leaves the fort to summon help. In the picture's most praised set-piece he runs through the forest, exhausting the three Iroquois who chase him. The scenes alternate between close shots of the dense woods and long shots across open space in the failing light. The only sounds are the exhausted gasps of the runners and the intrusive tom-tom music to remind you that they are Indians.

As the fort falls to the raiders, Lana wields a musket to defend the women and children. The raiders break in just before the moment that the soldiers brought by Gil arrive to repulse them. He searches the fort to find his brave wife in her blue coat, and the soldiers search the fort to find Caldwell. They interrogate a filthy trio of Tories, only to be directed to the church pulpit where Blue Back stands grinning, pulling down an eye patch over his eye.

The scene which ends the picture seems to follow a short while later, but Gil and Lana are walking through the fort as it is rebuilt with their son, who looks a bit older than the 18 months of so of real time that has passed since the picture started. They watch the regulars leave, who report the surrender of Cornwallis and the war's end. They also see the new flag of their new country. All stop to see it being raised, including Blue Back, and Daisy, Sarah McKlenner's black servant. Despite a pardonable moment of fluster during childbirth, Daisy was given as much dignity as a menial could be afforded; neither Mammy nor Prissy,

she stands alone in one of those shots that Lindsey Anderson called Ford's Whitmanesque manner, endorsing the dignity of one and all.<sup>319</sup> "It's a pretty flag," says Lana.

It ties up neatly all the loose threads of the plot, but it is quite different from the ending Edmonds wrote. Some of the changes are necessary because of the medium and the lack of time to show the novel's entire plot. Some were necessary because of the change of focus dictated by the demands of "giving a show." Edmonds' Sarah McKlenner did indeed will her place to the Martins, but they never got it—it was taken by the state in lieu of unpaid taxes, taxes assessed according to values in the King's prewar accounts; taxes, as the survivors bitterly note, for services not rendered by the state.<sup>320</sup> To note that, or to note the near total absence of regulars from the Valley during the five years of war, would end the picture on a sour, un-uplifting and even unpatriotic note. The novel's comment on actually seeing the Continental flag for the first time, at Fort Stanwix in 1777, was someone noting that the red stripes were cut out of a camp follower's petticoat, the first time they saw it raised in an honest cause.<sup>321</sup>

The most striking alteration is the siege of the fort that ends the picture. It does not happen in the book and it never happened in reality. Only regulars attempted to capture forts and they did so only with artillery and siegeworks. The fort at Cherry Valley was attacked, but only to suppress fire from its walls. The raiders would chase the settlers to the fort, stay out of musket range and destroy the neighborhood, taunting the men in the fort to come out and fight, which, after Wyoming, they never did.

Such a siege and attack *does* happen in *America*, Griffith's and Chambers' 1925 movie. The fort falls, and is instantly recaptured by rescuing Continentals brought by the hero. The action in the Ford's picture does seem more natural and less melodramatic, excepting the sight of Claudette Colbert firing a musket, but it is exactly the same action. Despite all the

advantages of Edmonds' research and storytelling, and the resources of Hollywood's best screenwriters—one of them arguably America's greatest living novelist—in the end they were reduced to cribbing from Robert W. Chambers.

It could have been because the cost of the massive fort set required its use in every scene possible. The actual chase through the winter forest of the retreating raiders that Edmonds wrote, full of atmosphere and suspense may have been too expensive to film, and thanks to the picture's simplified narrative, harder to follow. You can almost hear Pat Hobby's satisfaction at writing the necessary death of the villain in such a clever, elliptical manner.

*Drums Along the Mohawk* did very good business. It received good, sometimes glib reviews. *Time's* ended "Fans who like their war paint thick, their war whoops bloodcurdling and their arson Technicolored, get their money's worth in this picture. Others may be as thankful as the settlers when the war is ended."<sup>32</sup> But flocked such numbers of fans to the box office that *Drums Along the Mohawk* made a profit, and made more money for the studio when it was re-released in 1947.

Frank Nugent, writing in the *New York Times*, was more aware of what had happened on both sides of the screen. He praised the picture, the actors and John Ford, but noted

The Revolutionary period, oddly enough, has been one of the least exploited epochs in our national history—by the screen, that is; and Mr. Edmonds's novel dealt with one of the least familiar phases of it: the revolution on the frontier, in the backwoods region of New York, where a scattering of farmers, chiefly of German stock, went through four years of Indian raids, of British and Tory pillaging expeditions, with little help from the "Yankee" colonial army, with little sense of their national destiny.

If there is any objection to Lamar Trotti's and Sonya Levien's adaptation of Mr. Edmonds's book, it must be on that last point. For, except for the final tableau of the Stars and Stripes being planted atop the settlement fort, a tableau in which the writers have attempted, belatedly, to convey the colonists' amazed realization that this is what they have been fighting for, the film quite ignores the most significant phase of the novel, which was Mr.

Edmonds's constant reminder that this bitter and brutal chapter of the war was not fought by a militantly idealistic citizenry driven to revolution by British tyranny, but by an ill-equipped rabble whose chief concern was the preservation of their farms, the maintenance of civil order.<sup>323</sup>

It was suggested that Ford's later hiring of Nugent as a screenwriter had something to do with neutralizing his effect as an acute critic of Ford's pictures. The fact that Nugent scripted the finest of Ford's later output, and the review quoted above, suggest the opposite: that his acute insight was the *basis* of his hiring. Unlike the reviewer for *Time*, Nugent finds the root flaw in the picture, based upon an understanding the source novel.

The relative failure of *The Howards of Virginia*, the other American Revolution picture that year, may have killed the genre for another 60 years. *Drums Along the Mohawk* was the exception that tested the rule; it was a *frontier western*, which is probably exactly what Zanuck wanted, and is seen so today by critics, despite the source novel's faithful recreation of the political struggle.

Reviewers today tend to place it in the second rank of Ford's efforts. Competently made but less inspired than Ford's pictures preceding and following it, it is respected now for the themes of frontier community and the solidarity of the common man explored more completely in other Ford films. It was his first color picture, and one of the very few pictures from a major studio about the American Revolution. It was a financial success and a qualified critical success but all of the praise is faint. Most movie critics attempt to shoehorn it into Ford's oeuvre of Western pictures, despite the fact that it does not truly take place in the wilderness, but a rustic settlement that has known civilization, however rude, for at least a generation.

Scholars of popular culture find much of interest in it. John E. O'Connor set it in the context of the 1930's—the Depression; the apparent failure of the National system, as noted

by Edmonds himself in his foreword to the novel; and the need to reaffirm American values thus brought into question. The depth to which Edmonds questions those values and assumptions is not as important to him as the manner in which Zanuck and Ford dispel any doubts raised from the material. The picture is an engine to establish national consensus in the face of a growing international threat.<sup>324</sup>

Edward Countryman accepts that thesis but is less sure of its necessity or its success. A close reading of the novel has made him respect Edmonds' research and conclusions. He is pleased to find his own obscure Mohawk Valley surname given to a minor character in the novel, and a Tory at that. Countryman places book and picture in a wider cultural context, going back to the historical records of the Mohawk Valley for the novel and discussing the iconography of Gilbert Stuart and Benjamin West for the depiction of Indians in the movie. He grants the need of the filmmakers to create a product less complex and more conducive to national mythology, but his detailed comparison of the novel's complex discussion of historical issues to the film's simplifications shows where his feelings lie.<sup>325</sup>

(One issue not explored by either writer is the fact that the many printings and heavy sales of the novel made it a greater popular success than most of the movies made by Hollywood in those years. Given that fact, popular audiences in 1939 might indeed have been ready for a little more political and emotional complexity than Zanuck was ready to give them.)

Countryman shows that time and again the moviemakers consistently simplify, gloss over or omit outright all of the complexities Edmonds placed on the story. After making all due allowances for the limitations of the respective mediums he concludes

Edmonds wrote a novel that combined hard research into the dynamics of a historic social crisis with a form that opened that research to a mass public. Ford, Zanuck, Trotti, Faulkner, and the rest made of that novel

a film which pictures two forces that must conflict because their nature demands it and which argues that the triumph of the American cause obliterates all divisions, whether of race, class or sex.<sup>326</sup>

The “two forces” are represented by the Martins—rustic virtue opposed to gentle sensibility, evolving into a single unity of spirit. That the conflict seems artificial and the dialectic arbitrary, and that the “obliteration” of division—all the problems suggested by the final closing shots of Daisy the black servant and Blue Back the Oneida—seems forced is the fault of the filmmakers.

It is possible to look at Edmonds’ novel and see that some parts of the argument are not given full weight. Despite their sympathetic depiction, he does not seem to really understand the Iroquois; he writes from the viewpoint of a white man trying to make sense of them, and ends up reproducing the limited viewpoints of the story’s white characters. His depiction of Brant is the most obvious example. Yet his mistakes are honest ones; he is clearly writing to the limit of his ability and understanding, and even conscious of it: he might regard a deeper attempt at understanding as an anachronism for a novel set in 1777. None of his characters is gifted with an understanding or recognition past the immediate.

The picture looks at the past through the other end of the telescope. Where Edmonds’ broad focus on all things regardless of significance gives the immediacy of uncertainty, the picture knows that *we* know that the American flag will be flying at the end, and that the names above the title will be watching it fly. In the picture all things tend to be inevitable. Countryman notes the “forces that must conflict”—they must conflict, because without that elemental plot point there will not be a conventional Hollywood movie.

O’Connor and Countryman give the filmmakers too much credit in ascribing the purpose to their method. They feel that Zanuck and his employees are trying to create a cultural statement, however simplified and banal. But Zanuck’s disdain of the mosaic

Edmonds created—what he called “. . . a rambling jumble of historical and revolutionary data.”—caused him to jettison all but the basic main plotline: “. . . a pioneer boy who took a city girl to the Mohawk Valley to live . . . their ups and downs, their trials and tribulations . . .” and he did not even get *that* right. Despite all other names on the credits, the screenplay is Zanuck’s work, as noted by his chief story editor. “I think the thing that gave us the fine script we shot was, as much as anything else, your own constant revision and elimination, revision and elimination, every time a new treatment showed its head.”<sup>327</sup> As the revisions piled up, Zanuck seems to have methodically stripped the story of everything that made it distinctive.

In the object of creating a pleasing entertainment, he turned reality on its head. As Nugent noted, the state and national government made more useful interventions into the struggle for survival by the valley folk in the 104 minutes of the movie, than in the 600 pages of the novel. Edmonds saw these useless efforts as parallel to those similar efforts by the government to alleviate the depression, something a bit too controversial in 1939. Zanuck’s script shows the beleaguered settlers rescued by a Continental regiment, something else that never happened in reality. One of Edmonds’ major points was that these people defended and rescued themselves. The besieged fort broken into by Indians and Tories, and almost immediately relieved by Continental regulars, has no parallel in history, but it does in Griffith’s *America*. The story that some critics thought too old fashioned for 1924 was perfectly all right for Zanuck 15 years later. The finished movie compared to its source novel is often banal, with some of the ethnic characterizations obnoxious enough for vaudeville. They are relieved only by Ford’s touches at the peripheries, occasionally intruding into the center of the picture, which touches give the picture its only distinction.

Zanuck’s purpose was not to show the dialectic but to show the *show*; in the words of



his yes-man, “. . . to *Give A Show* . . . to *Make Entertainment*.” That it seems to make a simplistic point about American triumphant inclusionism is little more than extending the happy ending to the rest of the cast, some of whom will not be included for generations. As Countryman notes, “A serious and sophisticated attempt at a people’s history was transformed into a myth.”<sup>328</sup>

What John Ford thought of mythology may be seen eight years later, in his own production of *Fort Apache*. Here class and social tensions at an Army base in 1880’s Arizona divide the members of a regiment. Its colonel (Fonda!) is a snobbish alcoholic martinet who regards his junior officers and the Apache with equal contempt. The sole civil representative of the federal government is a dishonest and dissolute Indian Agent. Opposed to the agent is the Apache chief Cochise, whose honor and integrity Ford conveys with the visual iconography most other directors would use for the Son of Man.

Long after the Colonel’s vainglorious charge results in the inevitable and just destruction of the regiment in battle against the Apache, a surviving officer hears reporters discuss the greatness of the dead colonel. He knows it is a lie, but remains silent, acceding to the myth. Some critics mistake that for Ford’s own attitude about necessary myths, apparently oblivious to Ford’s ruthless dissection of that very myth in the preceding story.

Zanuck went his way giving shows. He did his best work with people like Ford, but they did their best work without him, and he became the image and caricature of the big talking movie mogul who created shows of little substance past their bottom line. The next show he did was with Ford as well, *The Grapes of Wrath*, but this time Ford had his own handle on the material early on, and a sympathetic photographer of genius, Gregg Toland, shooting in black and white a story that needed little prettification. He also took the members of what was even now becoming known as his stock company. Henry Fonda was

playing an edgier, even murderous, take on the all-American youth; John Carradine was playing a dazed, dreamy saint. The carryover was deep; Russell Simpson, Dorris Bowden (a sweet, quiet girl who was the perfect casting for Edmonds' Lana), Ward Bond, Mae Marsh and Ford's brother Frank had all played parts in *Drums Along the Mohawk*, and would reappear in *The Grapes of Wrath*.<sup>329</sup> Ford's sentimental/paternal wardship of the old folks from the silent days was another of his hallmarks. Mae Marsh had been one of Griffith's stars and had faded with sound and age, but Ford found a place for her in these and many other features.

John Big Tree, Blue Back, first worked for Ford in *The Iron Horse* in 1920, and just a few months previously in *Stagecoach*. His most enduring credit now is as one of the three models for the Indian head on the 5-cent piece, but he had been to the pictures' Mohawk Valley before. In 1916, as Gowah, he wrestled to the death with Walter Butler in Robert M. Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76*.

*The entertainment business model of the first decade of sound pictures—the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood—had come into being to avoid the excesses of the old time showmen like Griffith. With a powerful producer to control costs and artistic excesses, always aware of the needs of the business to show a consistent profit, it really was show business. It worked very well with the journeyman directors and artisans who made most of the pictures at that time.*

*John Ford was not a journeyman, he was in the first rank of American filmmakers. He had directed successful prestigious pictures. He had recently demonstrated his ability to film literary works with *The Informer*, and had worked with historic American themes ever since 1924's *The Iron Horse*, but at this stage of his career, he was the employee of Darryl Zanuck. If the right cards were dealt his way, Ford could make a successful, honored and personal epic like *How Green Was My Valley*. If Zanuck presented him with a cold hand, that was what Ford played.*

*The movie of Drums Along the Mohawk did the business it was expected to do. It enhanced the careers of all who worked on it. Only knowledge of the source novel, and the awareness of what John Ford was capable of doing even then under the studio system, makes it seem lesser than it is, but it was never intended as anything more than a profit-making enterprise. To that end, the complex reconstruction of the frontier and the slow discovery of the inner heroism of its people was discarded and replaced by stock situations and characterizations and trite melodrama that were old when Chambers and Griffith filmed it in 1924.*

*The contemporary (1940) success of these stale elements is all the more disquieting. The mass audience that was able to digest the complexities of Edmonds' novel was also able to accept it being filmed with banal simplicity. These simple elements are supplemented by Ford's own superb visual sense, by the technical skill of the visual artisans who worked on the picture and by several key performances. It looks much better than it really is.*

*At this point in the popular culture, money and skill are not the determinants that make something honest and true to the source matter. All of the studio's resources and the skills of its creative personnel could not match the effort of one writer working alone. The artists working on the movie were arguably greater artists than Edmonds, but they were working in a process in which money risked and money earned were the benchmarks of success. The risk as well was collective, spread out among the studio's main budget and the artists' own brief engagement with the material. Ford would make eight pictures in a three-year span. Zanuck would produce at least as many and the creative talent often worked on two or three projects at a time. Had the picture failed, the loss of money would be the only loss—everyone involved would be cushioned by the success of their other projects that year.*

*Edmonds had no such cushion. For several years, his life was his novel. Past successes paid the bills, but his future rested on a project that was proving to be the most difficult of all his novels. Perhaps he used the story of his characters and their uphill struggle against adversity as an example for himself. His own writings point to his deep engagement with his material. The end of his novel-writing career may have resulted from*

*never being able to recreate so deep an engagement with any other story. It may be asking too much for a stranger or group of strangers to take his engagement and make it theirs, but if it could be done, Ford was the man for it.*

*One side effect of the movie's success, and the cachet of Ford's reputation, is that the movie's triteness is mistakenly attributed to the novel by potential readers who might otherwise enjoy its depth of characterization and its historical accuracy. This is the usual failing when literature is adapted to the screen; the opposite case, that of greater depth being added to an adaptation is very rare. Yet it happened the very next year.*

### Chapter Thirteen: The Devil and Stephen Vincent Benét, 1938, 1941

*Literature seldom fared well on the screen in Hollywood's Golden Age. Even the good movies made from stories and books suffered heavily when compared to the originals. The fabled advice of Ernest Hemingway to authors selling a book to Hollywood was to stand at the Nevada border, throw your book across the state line into California and catch a satchel of money in return. By no means, go to Hollywood; that was the place where talents like Fitzgerald and Faulkner wasted their years doctoring scripts.*

*Yet if a project was not too expensive, there was a chance that something worthwhile could be done. Ford had filmed *The Long Voyage Home*, and impressed O'Neill, in 1940. RKO, a smaller trying to create a niche for itself, tried to do so with art. One way was to give a contract to the New York stage and radio director Orson Welles and give him a free hand. Another was to bring a poet to Hollywood and put him to work with a crew of old pros.*

*Walter Butler's last appearance in the popular culture, and with it, the last appearance of the matter of *Cherry Valley*, was as a secondary character in a short story. What is major is how that story was adopted to a film made the year after *Drums Along the Mohawk*.*

The hot ticket among DVD enthusiasts the Christmas of 2007 was the lavish set of 20 DVD's collected under the title *Ford at Fox*. It comprises the complete set of pictures made by John Ford as an employee of Fox studios. It included a companion book, copies of promotional materials and a heavy case to hold it all. The individual movies contain commentary tracks and complimentary short features.

Had you told a moderately literate person in 1939 that contemporary movies, even the best, would be collected and viewed at home as well as at revival houses decades after their release, they might have doubted you, especially after you mentioned that the list price was \$240.

Going on to tell them that *Ford at Fox* was available even in respectable bookstores might be a shock as well, but not as big a shock as telling them that the very same bookstore will not have a single volume of prose or poetry by the Pulitzer Prize-winning (twice) poet Stephen Vincent Benét. Moreover, they can not do so because no such work is now in print; one must find his work in secondhand bookstores or resale shops. There is but one book of his now in print—a play, an adaptation of one of his short stories. Even your auditor from 1939 will be able to guess which one.

Known today mainly for one short story, Stephen Vincent Benét was in his own time a major figure in American cultural life. His epic poem *John Brown's Body* had the sales figures of a best selling novel; poetry had not sold so well since Longfellow's *Hiawatha* and *Evangeline*. *Western Star*, a similar epic poem, was cut short by Benét's premature death in 1943. That death was treated in the press almost as a casualty of war, since Benét's work was regarded as an essential resource in the war effort.<sup>330</sup>

"Few imaginative writers in the United States have done so much in so short a time to bring the American past to the people as a vibrant, inspiring, moralizing force"<sup>331</sup>. So wrote Michael Kammen in 1991. The sales figures alone bear out his statement, but even in 1991 Benét was disappearing from the bookshelves and publisher's lists. Part of the reason was the sheer glut of his books published in Benét's own prime and the years afterwards. Many of the editions were published to lower wartime or book club standards and decayed more quickly on library shelves, were discarded sooner, and were not replaced.

Such a fall from public taste is another topic to explore, the way that Kammen explored the rise of public writers—American authors who sought to record and bring to a wide public what writers about John Ford call the "national story": a popular consensus of national myths with modern pertinence. It did not encompass everyone who wrote about the

past or American subjects. William Faulkner was not one of them; his myths were unwholesome and pessimistic, and his past was not even past. Walter D. Edmonds could have been one of them, but he refused to remake a dark unhappy past into an age of heroes. His finding consolation in the fact that the present decay of the social fabric was amply echoed in the past was not exactly what public writers like Robert E. Sherwood had in mind. He was interested in honestly retelling the stories of the people of his own section, not in creating national importance for them.

The modern intellectual consensus is that these public writers are a relic of their age, who do not translate well into ours. If literature is news that *stays* news, their writings tend to be found in the stacks. They are valued for the window they open on their age, and for their public spirit, and their own felicities of style and imagination.

One of these felicities is Benét's reimagining of Washington Irving's grafting of the Faust legend to New England stock, *The Devil and Tom Walker*. Tom Walker is a miser and a moneylender who eagerly accepts the bargain offered by the Satanic Mr. Scratch. When the note comes due he goes to Hell. Benét softened the character of his Faust and ingeniously added a tenet of the American creed: that a good lawyer can get you out of anything. In his story that lawyer is the American Cato, Senator Daniel Webster. Benét's Faust is named Jabez Stone, denied the titular honor because his name lacks the resonance, alliteration and sass of *The Devil and Daniel Webster*.

Jabez Stone is not a miser, but a New Hampshire farmer down on his luck. In a moment of despair he accepts the offer from a stranger, sometimes called Scratch, soft-spoken and dressed in black, of little outward show but possessing large white teeth that seem to be pointed. When the bond matures, Stone seeks help from fellow New Hampshireman Daniel Webster. Webster immediately employs his legal wiles against the

stranger, who, living up to his biblical appellation King of Lawyers, overrules them all. Called a “foreign prince” who may not impress Americans into his service, the stranger replies:

“When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck . . . to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don’t like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours.”<sup>332</sup>

When Webster demands that Stone be tried by an American jury, the stranger readily complies.

If Jabez Stone had been sick with terror before, he was blind with terror now. For there was Walter Butler, the loyalist, who spread fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution . . .<sup>333</sup>

. . . followed by his peers: Simon Girty, King Philip, Governor Dale, Thomas Morton, Edward Teach, John Smeat, and five unnamed others. It is an odd assortment; King Philip was fighting for his people against the encroachments of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Thomas Dale was a strict but wise early governor of Jamestown; neither could fairly be called the Devil’s own. The murderous Reverend John Smeat was a fiction of Benét’s own making—one would think by 1936 Benét could have come up with more Americans from Hell. The omission of General Arnold is noted—he is on other business; this being 1850, presumably in South Carolina—in his stead as foreman of the jury is Major Walter Butler.

Judge Hathorne of Salem Village is seated and the trial begins, and begins badly for the defense. The stranger states the facts and the law of the case and they all favor the prosecution. Webster having the facts against him pleads emotionally to the jury, reminding them of their own lives in America and the pleasures of life. He reminded them of the American story and how they were a part of that as well, no matter their turnings. He made Jabez Stone into everyman, and every man whom they had been.

In short, having no facts and no law, he pleads that the jury ignore both and vote



their emotions, a tactic now called, to the real Webster's undoubted horror, nullification. The jury declines to retire to deliberate. The foreman stands.

Walter Butler rose in his place and his face had a dark, gay pride on it.

"The jury has considered its verdict," he said, and looked the stranger full in the eye. "We find for the defendant, Jabez Stone."

With that, the smile left the stranger's face, but Walter Butler did not flinch.

"Perhaps 'tis not strictly in accordance with the evidence," he said, "but even the damned may salute the eloquence of Mr. Webster."

They vanish from the room.

The stranger turned to Dan'l Webster, smiling wryly.

"Major Butler was always a bold man," he said. "I had not thought him quite so bold." <sup>334</sup>

Then the stranger tells Webster of his own fate—never to be President, to be reviled for compromising with slavery, his sons' death in war, and finally the preservation of the Union, which news rouses Webster to joyously evicting the stranger with the end of his boot. He wakes Stone and has him fetch a jug, and the narrator tells us that since that day the stranger has never been seen in New Hampshire—but Massachusetts and Vermont are another matter.

It is not hard to see why the story entered the canon. A man is damned, but not for long. His lawyer is an icon of American middle-of-the-road compromise, so tactically equivocal that no party now claims him as a forbear. The American ideal is nature reverie and the notion of being a small part (albeit evil) of a great thing, without delving too deeply into the morality of that greatness. It is a conscious appeal to the thing then called Americana, Kammen's "vibrant, inspiring, moralizing force." The most recent juryman from Hell predeceased George Washington. Things are better now, and will be better in the future. It may be that Benét did not believe all this, but it seems sure that he wished to.

The Walter Butler he evoked does not come from history, and certainly not from Edmonds's crabbed, ambitious man. It may owe something to Swiggett, but Swiggett at least in the documentary part of his book does not present any evidence for Butler's "dark, gay pride". That dark gaiety *does* appear in the passages Swiggett quotes from Robert W. Chambers, and perhaps Benét read or reread those passages and found the foreman for his jury. Chambers was even then passé, but it seem unlikely that he would have been out of Benét's frame of reference.

Benét had a taste for romance. He complained that *Drums Along the Mohawk* lacked that dash of Dumas' romantic heroism that he seemed to think essential in writing historical fiction. His own most famous work, *John Brown's Body*, retells the history of the Civil War, complete with poetic sidebars on the major historical figures. The core of the poem deals with two men and their experience of the war: Jack Ellyat is a Connecticut farmboy; Clay Wingate is a Virginia cavalier left-handedly descended from the Stuarts. A southern farmboy and a northern aristocrat would have been just as likely, but Benét seems to have had a horror of confounding his audience's expectations. He wrote it in Paris while he was homesick for America. Edmonds wrote his own book a short walk away from the places he wrote about, which probably put a damper on his romantic tendencies.

Benét seemed to write with his market in mind, and *The Devil and Daniel Webster* is clearly a diversion for the *Saturday Evening Post*, thirteen pages to be read in a setting, after dinner on an autumn day—October 24, 1936 to be exact. The referents—old New England, Daniel Webster—can be recalled by anyone who survived history class, or *The Devil and Tom Walker* from English Two. It was probably written with just enough attention to fill the *Post's* requirements, with an eye to later inclusion in an anthology, and no more. Benét may not have expected that it would be entombed into the canon of High School literature, or that

the indifferent who hated Nathaniel Hawthorne would come to hate him, but based on some of his contemporary stories about youth, he might have relished the knowledge.

Then something odd happened. RKO bought his story, and hired him to adopt it for a movie. Despite Benét's previous experience—he had written the screenplay for D.W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* in 1930—or perhaps because of it, he had a veteran scriptwriter, Dan Totheroh, to help with the screenplay form. The main writing problem was taking a thirteen-page story and expanding it into a 106-minute movie. The rule of thumb was a page per minute of screen time; in ordinary writing terms, Totheroh and Benét had to turn a short story into a novella. Totheroh interwove Benét's plotting and characterization to give it dramatic coherence and drive, and the existing screenplay and movie combines that drive with the cultural weight Benét used in his stories and poetic works. It helped as well that Totheroh's own writing showed an empathy with the struggling masses of his own time, having written a novel about Depression refugees seeking a better life in California three years before *The Grapes of Wrath*.<sup>335</sup> The actual realities of life on a failing farm are described with greater detail than Benét's own short survey.<sup>336</sup>

The story for the movie puts flesh on the bare bones of the short story. We see the bad luck that dogs Jabez Stone and watch his mounting frustration as the pig gets loose and breaks a leg and has to have a splint applied. Daniel Webster appears early as a champion of the rights of the ordinary farmers against the crushing weight of debt; debt well illustrated by the plight of Stone and his neighbors, and their attempts to organize a grange. The Stranger appears early as well, trying to tempt Webster with ambition. Jabez Stone grows from simple, down on his luck farmer with some money, into Economic Man, a grasping plutocrat of the countryside. He loans money at rates more usurious than the local miser and hires help at starvation wages from among his former friends. Worst of all, he takes a mistress, Belle, a

mysterious girl from “over the mountain.”<sup>337</sup>

There is far more dialogue and it is used to display character. This was nothing new for Benét. *John Brown's Body* used speech similarly; the prologue features a long conversation between two men who gradually reveal themselves as the master and mate of a slave ship. Such passages attracted Charles Laughton to adopt *John Brown's Body* for the stage as a series of dramatic readings and dialogues for three actors. Based on *John Brown's Body* alone, it is possible to say that Benét had a natural dramatic sense, and that he wrote scenes and dialogue that translated as easily to the screen as they did to the stage. That dramatic sense manifests itself in the speeches. Benét now had the stage to say what he could only describe in the story. Instead of talking about Webster's eloquence and Scratch's sly seductiveness, he could display it, and the speeches Benét wrote for Webster are more eloquent than Benét's description of them.

Hollywood history is full of failed attempts at filming legendary screenplays, and as we have seen, Hollywood in the 1940's was not exactly a haven for aesthetes. How lucky it was then, that Benét's short story should have been bought by RKO the same year that they decided to devote themselves to art. That year RKO gave Orson Welles his carte blanche to make *Citizen Kane*. While *The Devil and Daniel Webster* was far less risky—a magazine story by a popular author—it would require the right people to make it a success.

Thomas Mitchell, cast as Webster, had an accident on set and had to be replaced; he is said to be visible in a couple of long shots still in the picture.<sup>338</sup> He was replaced with Edward Arnold, who usually played the kind of man who would have called Webster a Bolshevik. Arnold is stolid and calm, almost bemused to be playing the hero. He delivers his speeches as though they arose out of his heart, instead of remembered lines:

Gentlemen of the jury, I ask that you give Jabez Stone another chance to

walk upon the earth, among—the trees, the growing corn, the smell of grass in spring—What would you give for one more chance to see those things that you must all remember and often long to feel again? For you were all men once. Clean American air was in your lungs—you breathed it deep, for it was free and blew across an earth you loved. These are common things I speak of, small things, but they are good things.<sup>339</sup>

In his own time Walter Huston was most renowned for playing the automotive tycoon in *Dodsworth* on Broadway and in Hollywood, but he also played the title role in Griffith's and Benét's *Abraham Lincoln*, and the year after that, the first screen incarnation of Wyatt Earp in *Saint Johnson*. He was at home playing the iconic, and Scratch, the devil, was hardly a stretch.

In the short story, Scratch is little more than a bank manager pursuing an overdraft. In the screenplay, Benét and Totheroth had placed Scratch early, tempting Webster and Stone, but they also place him on the edge of crowd scenes, peering at the principals, or marching in the parade that welcomes Daniel Webster to Cross Corners, beating the bass drum furiously, bent cheroot clenched in his teeth; at a barn dance, he plays the fiddle and calls the tune. Bernard Herrmann, who wrote the picture's Oscar-winning score, laid down four individual fiddle tracks and ran them together to create a natural but unsettling discordance.

Giving Scratch and larger role was deliberate, part of the opening-up of the picture: Benét wrote it so, and under William Dieterle's direction, Joseph August used all the tricks of the German impressionistic camera style to make Scratch/Huston dominate all his scenes. He takes such a pleasure in the antics of his victims that you could forget they are damned.

Two of those victims are the Stones, husband and wife. They are underplayed by James Craig and Anne Shirley, but not underwritten. Their homely charm is the counterpoint to the bombast and rhetoric of Webster and Scratch Craig lacks Henry Fonda's elegance but

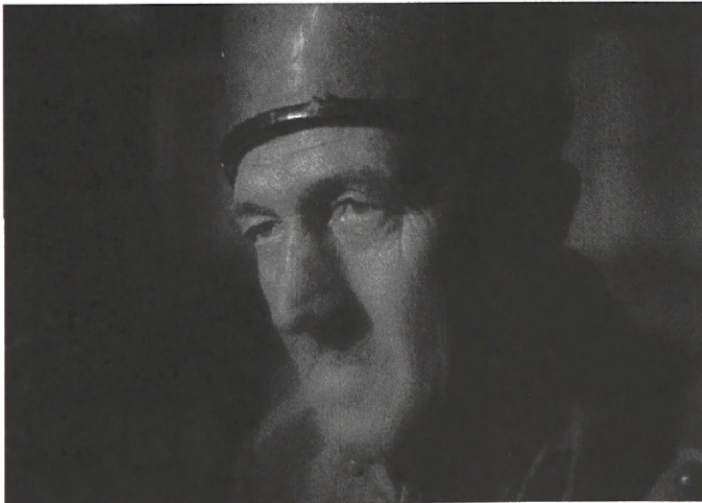
his eager oafishness better suits a hardscrabble farm, just as Shirley's warm tranquility signals a confidence deeper than Claudette Colbert's.

Stone has a series of misfortunes that lead to him cursing his bad luck, and his accidental summoning of Scratch. Senator Daniel Webster has long been acquainted with Scratch, who constantly tries to tempt him through political ambition. It is a quiet tell that when Jabez Stone turns bad, he starts by making a speech that Daniel Webster is too much under the influence to give. Ambition leads to the acquaintance of the devil, who can be resisted only by a resolute character.

Judgment day arrives. Webster appears for the defence and Scratch summons the jury:

You must pardon the leathery toughness of one or two ... Captain Kidd—he killed a man for gold; Simon Girty—the renegade; he burned men for gold; Governor Dale—he broke men on the wheel; Asa, the Black Monk—he choked them to death; Floyd Ireson and Stede Bonnet, the fiendish butchers; Walter Butler—the King of the Massacre; Big and Little Harp—robbers and murderers; Teach, the Cutthroat; Morton, the vicious lawyer ... and ... General Benedict Arnold—you remember him, no doubt. Dastard, liar, traitor, knave—Americans all . . . <sup>340</sup>

Twelve men this time, and they file into the spectral jury box. Judge Hathorne appears on



the bench, played by H.B. Warner, DeMille's Christ in *King of Kings*; his face shows every step of the way from Heaven to Hell. They are all old men, even the man who died before he was thirty, Walter Butler. The *dark, gay, proud, bold* man of the short story

is now in close-up an old man in a brass-faced ranger's cap, his face a woeful mask as

Webster quietly asks him:

You, Walter Butler—What would you give to have another chance to let the grasses grow in Cherry Valley without the stain of blood?<sup>341</sup>

Benét's Hell is a place where old men think about the past. It is also a place where Walter Butler may regain his standing as a human being. No longer an antihero of melodrama, or even Edmonds' proud, ambitious little man, Butler puts aside his defiance and looks upon his great, terrible career with human, manly regret.

After much business, faithful to the story but allowing full reign to Arnold and Huston, the story ends happily with Jabez Stone restored to his life, his family and his poverty, and Scratch with nothing to show for his efforts but a fine peach pie.

Here it ends. After this, no one would ever return to Walter Butler to present him in a film, or in a novel. His cultural significance, and that of Cherry Valley, became almost nil in the national culture. If it was to end so, it was well for it to end here. Stephen Vincent Benét—whose cultural significance may have faded to nearly that point by now—took his popular culture, a people's culture, seriously.

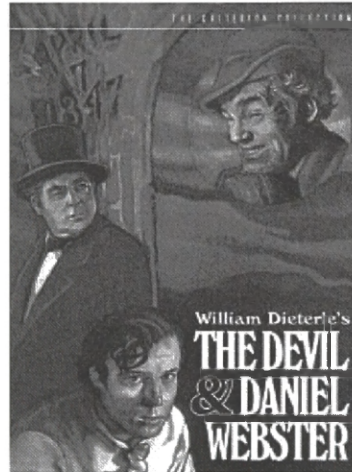
It's always seemed to me that legends and yarns and folktales are as much a part of the real history of a country as proclamations and provisos and constitutional amendments. The legends and the yarns get down to the roots of the people—they tell a good deal about what people admire and want, about what sort of people they are.—Stephen Vincent Benét, 1941<sup>342</sup>



The people of 1941 had a hard time with Benét's fable. The critics loved it, but the trouble began on the very first page. Southern audiences stayed away from anything with "Devil" in the title, so one of Scratch's promises—*All That Money Can Buy*—became the new title. Allegorical history

rarely filled theatres and RKO was reduced to using a poster whose most prominent feature was the alarmingly sexual image of Simone Simon, who played Stone's mistress from over the mountain.

The Criterion DVD release of 2005 gave no such false impression. The proper players are given their due prominence, with Huston over all, but Jabez Stone in the foreground. For the first time in decades, the full release version of 106 minutes is presented, including the twenty minutes cut from the film shortly after its 1941 release. The too-cool-for-you writer of the accompanying essay apologizes for the story's "astonishingly sentimental ending". He seems to think that Dieterle and RKO would have happily sent Stone and Webster to Hell, if only Benét had not interfered, and he must not have read the screenplay if he thinks that Dieterle contributed all the unsettling touches.<sup>343</sup>



My imaginary visitor from 1941 who walks into Borders, then, might be disappointed to see that Benét has disappeared from the bookshelves, but he might find consolation in seeing him very well represented, by one of his finest pieces of writing, in the DVD section.

*The thread that began in 1778 actually ended in 1936, with Walter Edmonds' definitive reordering of the whole matter of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk frontier. Benét's addend was more epilogue or coda and his Butler was the creation of Frederic and Chambers seen through Swiggett's faulty prism. That was enough for his story of 1938, another villain for the jury. In 1941, he had more time to think about it and more time to say it. He may also have had more of a chance to think about Edmonds' novel. Edmonds wrote in his forward that that the valley folk in 1778 were victims of the same forces as the people of 1936:*



*"a reckless Congress and ebullient finance." Jabez Stone and his neighbors face a similar combination in the 1941 screenplay; the struggle is no longer one man against his fate but a whole society under threat of imminent poverty, with only grasping moneylenders to relieve them. Edmonds' portrait of Butler, the sad egoist, is also the image of Butler in the screenplay. There is nothing gay, but much darkness, in the face we see, a world away from Barrymore.*

*The enduring success of the film adaptation of The Devil and Daniel Webster shows how close the film adaptation of Drums Along the Mohawk could have come to being true to its source. Both were collective efforts by Hollywood professionals, and even in 1940, the professionals at MGM had a higher reputation than the professionals at RKO. Yet the whole purpose of the enterprise was to make money, not art, and Drums Along the Mohawk was the moneymaker.*

*We are left again with chance. The Devil and Daniel Webster, and its legendary stablemate Citizen Kane, were made by RKO, a second-tier studio looking to raise its standing through prestige pictures. It did only in retrospect. Webster is acknowledged as a classic and Kane is the classic American film, but both did poor business at the time. The "artistic" regime at RKO was out the next year, and they went back to making money.*

## Chapter Fourteen: The End of the Story, 1940-2000

The Devil and Daniel Webster *marks the end of the matter of Cherry Valley in American culture, popular or otherwise. Such markers are rare. Threads taper off and fade.*

*It safe to say now that Walter Butler is dead and buried these sixty-nine years. The forces that brought him into American cultural consciousness are now themselves antiques, studied almost exclusively by scholars or non-discriminating enthusiasts. Edmonds and Benét alone have a claim to continuing attention through the quality and ubiquity of their work. Swiggett's work has disappeared, along with Chambers', except for a few fantastic novels prized more for their very existence than any quality aside from plot innovation. Harold Frederic, perhaps the cause of all this, is known for better novels.*

*Robert M. Goldstein's lost picture is a chapter in the history of jurisprudence, not art; Griffith's America is a chapter of his decline. If Ford's picture were lost, it would not make any difference in his critical reputation. All of these works have significance only within their cultural frame of reference. They emerged in their own times and disappeared when those times passed. In time, even Edmonds and Benét will fade. As good as they are, they never emerged into the front rank of lasting American art, but remain as emblems of their time—regionalists, reactionaries, popular entertainers who always say more about their American audience than they do about America.*

All of these works have significance now only within their cultural frame of reference. They emerged in their own times and disappeared when those times passed. What story remains to be told is that of Cherry Valley.

The hopes for progress and a boom raised by the Cherry Valley Pike—NY 20—lasted until the New York Thruway was planned and paved in the mid 1940's. Governor Dewey's great project—and to some, great betrayal of the Mohawk Valley—was drawn on the line of the Erie Canal. Cherry Valley, on the edge of the watershed, was to be returned to rural obscurity. Time brought understanding and acceptance, and trips north to the Mohawk

to view the eventual sprawl eventually brought relief. No one came to Cherry Valley for the bustle of the new, and no one stayed who wanted it. Those left behind by progress had chosen to be so left. *We don't want those restless people, who are forever going on!*

Even the old Pike was diverted in the age of the 50-mile an hour sedan, no longer running through the town but a mile north of it. The Pike's namesake is now a byway on it. It was this that saved the town from the boom of fiberglass and aluminum that marked the strip malling of interstate America. While the town itself has its share of shoddy, it is genuine country shoddy: peeling paint and decayed wood, a door sealed shut to complete a wall, a board nailed behind a window. The nearest Wal-Mart is eight miles east in Sharon Springs, and the big local attraction is the Baseball Hall of Fame in the fraudulence of Cooperstown fifteen miles south and west.

It was not wholly forgotten by time. The fast autos that forced the bypass also brought, and bring, refugees from the cities. To the commerce of the local farms is added the profits from maintaining the summer folk. Far enough from the metropolitan areas to discourage day-trippers but close enough to afford a country place a few hours drive from the city, Cherry Valley provided the sojourner a refuge from the bustle that allowed them the income to sustain a summer retreat.

All these old houses were owned by people—Robertsons, Campbells, Clarkes—who did not live far apart and composed a kind of country gentry who had a social life of their own, paying visits back and forth, in the fashion of the early days, that sometimes lasted for weeks. All these houses became white elephants that have been or are about to be turned into museums of other institutions. In the last of these I visited, the Campbell place in Cherry Valley, in which the same family has lived since the eighteenth century, I found that the present owner, Mr. A.P. Whitehead, a New York Lawyer, who is connected with the Historical Association, has decided to sell it. He has kept up the house and still has two farms here, but only comes up in the summer. There is nothing for him to do except hunt and entertain guests. . . .

It is a very fine old frame house, now painted yellow, with the inevitable solid stone doorstep. The older part was built by 1796, the later part added

between 1853 and 1863. In the older part, a good white carved mantelpiece like ours, with the familiar oval motif; in the new part, a big fireplace with decorative plaster molding that is less handsome and rather out of keeping. In this living room, long guns on the wall from the Revolution and subsequent wars, and framed letters, among them one to some ancestor from James Fennimore Cooper, who was living not far away at the bottom of Otsego Lake. . . .—Edmund Wilson, 1970<sup>344</sup>

Nothing indicates that the Squire of Talcottville traveled the short distance south and east to meet the most famous man—and writer —ever to live in Cherry Valley.

It was not so much his own desire, but that of Barbara Rubin, who decided that he needed rural felicity in which to settle down, and that East Hill Farm was a good place to raise the family that she planned to have with him, that brought Allen Ginsberg to Cherry Valley.<sup>345</sup> He came in May of 1967 looking for a quiet place to avoid aspects of Sixties' bad craziness. His longtime companion Peter Orlovsky needed a quiet place as well, to escape the easy availability of needle drugs in New York. Barbara's choice was a severe alternative to the metropolis, with no electricity and no telephone. Ginsberg ordered a telephone, but attempted to make his own power using the existing windmill. The menagerie of farm animals soon departed, as did Rubin, but Ginsberg and Orlovsky stayed on. In the epochal year of 1969, they watched Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon in handyman Ed Urich's cabin, on a battery-powered television.

Watching the White Image, electric moon, white mist drifting over woods

St. John's Wort & Hawkeye wet with chance Yarrow on the green hillside<sup>346</sup>

A month later, the Woodstock music festival was held at Bethel, 80 miles distant. Visitors stopping by to and from it ran the risk of being pressed into service constructing an outbuilding that needed to be done before winter set in.<sup>347</sup>

Ginsberg kept his place in Cherry Valley for eighteen years. He had begun to think

of it as a financial burden some years before he sold it, but by then it had become a refuge for friends and colleagues, particularly Orlovsky, and there were moments when he found peace there. He stayed there alone the Christmas of 1972, with the few dogs that remained of his livestock, a foot of snow outside and a wood stove to stay warm and write by. Then the routine of writing, and feeding and watering the dogs, was broken by a visit from Gregory Corso in January, which may have saved his life. When he fell on the porch on some ice and broke a leg, Corso brought him inside and called for an ambulance. During his convalescence, friends came to nurse him. He was able to work on his writing and his meditation in relative peace, but the whole episode neatly summarizes the mixture of blessings that East Hill Farm represented for Allen Ginsberg.<sup>348</sup>

Old One the dog stretches stiff legged,  
soon he'll be underground. Spring's first fat bee  
buzzes yellow over the new grass and dead leaves  
What's this little brown insect walking zigzag  
across the sunny white page of Su Tung-p'o's poem?  
Fly away, tiny mite, even your life is tender—  
I lift the book and blow you into the dazzling void.<sup>349</sup>

His stay is cited proudly on Cherry Valley's website, and it had the effect of putting the place on the map in a minor way. Some of the pilgrims to East Hill Farm settled down nearby, and stayed on when Ginsberg left. The farm is again in the news, as are the pilgrims. They represent part of the opposition to the East Hill Wind Farm, a chain of twenty wind turbines two miles east of town. Standing on the crests of a chain of hills running three miles south from Highway 20, their most salient objectionable feature seems to be their stark, minimalist appearance: 400' tall stalks with 100' foot propellers. They represent a threat to a new name for an old concept: the *viewshed*; the towers will be visible for many miles around and audible

close by.

Articles about the controversy, fought out with petition drives and heated township meetings, tend to draw the battle lines between farmers and native sons (pro), and summer folk and recent arrivals (anti). This is simplistic, with Greens and environmentalists among the new people and preservationists among the old residents. However, it is hard to miss the irony in the complaint of one newcomer that his property will be worthless by the visual pollution; he is a retired manager for the ABC television network.<sup>350</sup> The controversy is ongoing, but no one seems to have noted the precedent of Allen Ginsberg's own efforts to get electricity from the windmill on East Hill Farm.

Another controversy found its way to Cherry Valley in 2000.

### **British Ire Over Movie Irks Some**

*By CHRIS CAROLA, Associated Press Writer*

CHERRY VALLEY, N.Y. (AP) - The British, upset over their portrayal in ``The Patriot," won't find much sympathy in this historic village in the rolling farmland south of the Mohawk River.

Residents note the atrocities the British commit in the Revolutionary War blockbuster are a Hollywood fabrication, but the 1778 massacre carried out here by their forces was a bloody reality.<sup>351</sup>

### **We won't apologise for The Patriot, say the residents of Cherry Valley**

David Usborne in upstate New York

THE FOLK of Cherry Valley, New York, do not feel too terribly sorry for the British for the way we are portrayed in the Mel Gibson film about the Revolutionary War, *The Patriot*. Nor are they minded to sympathise very much with British critics who have railed against Hollywood for butchering history.

The outrage voiced in the British media has cost *The Patriot* dear. At its opening last week in the UK, the Sony produced film did only pounds 1m in box office business. Hollywood experts blamed the disappointing business on the tide of opprobrium in the UK press.<sup>352</sup>

The historian's view of the Mel Gibson movie *The Patriot* has already been noted. Less well known is the British reaction to their negative depiction in the movie. How they could have hoped to escape some unhappy portrayals of their acts suppressing a rebellion is another matter and perhaps, no matter at all. The umbrage seems to have been inspired less by national pride and more by the British equivalent of Johnny Deadline. Andrew Roberts took time off from his historical work to declaim about *Hollywood's Racist Lies About Britain and the British*. One of his examples included the character played by Tim Roth in *Rob Roy*; the part may have been British, but so was every other part in the picture, except for the Irishman played by Eric Stolz. More to be expected from a cable gasbag than a biographer of Lord Salisbury, Roberts' column includes a call to good British men and women all to boycott the next James Bond movie.<sup>353</sup>

Gibson was already in for some stick after his similarly "anti-British" *Braveheart*, despite the fact that the erstwhile writer of *The Patriot* was the American Robert Rodat and the director was the German Roland Emmerich. This is because Gibson was the producer and the *auteur* of *The Patriot*, freely altering the script and giving his notes to the director. After he'd fired Brian Koppelman, the director/screenwriter of *Payback* and completed the film himself, a critic noted the altered, audience pleasing/pandering ending and asked Gibson why he'd changed it. "I think I know what I'm doing" was Gibson's reply.

*The Patriot*, even on the evidence of the altered script, was based upon the career of Francis Marion in the American Revolution. Historians would later attempt to attach several names to the mixed bag of characterization left by the numerous rewrites, but the inspiration

is clearly Marion's almost single-handed rallying of resistance in the Carolina backcountry. Rodat's original script was altered by Gibson and Emmerich for dramatic reasons and Francis Marion became Benjamin Martin.

Marion had been an early and enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution; Martin's experiences fighting the Cherokee had made him a near-pacifist. Marion was an old bachelor; Martin a widower with several children. Marion owned slaves; Martin had freed his. These changes made Martin a more flexible, dynamic character, as well as more modern-minded than the original. They also served to discourage any identification between the persons of Gibson and Marion, whom one disgruntled subordinate described as . . . *an ugly, cross, knock-kneed, booknosed son of a bitch.*<sup>354</sup> Marion, that is.

The story that remains may be summarized thus: a peace-loving farmer faces the invasion of his homeland with dismay, but does not resist. The occupation is at first peaceful, but acts of armed resistance provoke instant repression by the occupiers. When these measures do not stop the resistance, special units are sent in, comprised of ruthless officers leading local collaborators against their own people. These units respond with savage repression upon guilty and innocent alike, and the hero sees that he must at last resist. After a long and bloody struggle the occupiers are defeated, the special units wiped out and the farmer returns to his land in peace.

This describes the basic plot of *The Patriot*. In the character of the hero particularly, it describes Mel Gibson's character, and no actual leader of militia or guerillas in the Revolutionary South.

It is also a description of a movie genre, the Partisan Film, unique to Tito's Yugoslavia. These films began as state sponsored efforts to excite nationalistic fervor by recalling the heroic past of the resistance to the Germans in the Second World War. Because



of their simple themes and plots, and frequent action sequences, they became as popular as westerns, and even came to be called Partisan Westerns. Plot elements varied with time, but nearly all were based upon that basic plot. They began in the 1960's, flourished into the 1970's and ended with Tito's death.

The hero was a Yugoslavian farmer or worker. The enemy was the German army, and the special units were the SS and the native fascist militia, the Ustashi. The Croatian film critic Dragan Antulov described their semblance to *The Patriot*:

*The Patriot*, IMNSHO, owes less to American tradition and more to so-called Partisan films that used to be the rage in former Yugoslavia before the break-up. Those movies treated so-called "People's Liberation War of 1941-45" (WW2 in former Yugoslavia) in the same way *The Patriot* treats ARW. The characters, situations, their dilemmas and actions are almost identical - heroic American guerillas act as Partisans, British act as Nazis, Adam Baldwin's act as "home traitors", conservative citizenry is equally clueless as "bourgeoisie", French are late to help same as clueless "Anglo-American allies", racial equality is equally noble agenda as "new society of socialism", and even Mel Gibson looks very much like Ljubisa Samardzic in his early days . . . To make things even more interesting, distinction between Tom Wilkinson's gentleman general Cornwallis and Jason Isaac's genocidal thug Tavington is also taken from Partisan films and their distinction between gentlemanly Wehrmacht officers (usually played by late Peter Carsten) and genocidal SS/Gestapo thugs (usually played by Slovenian actors like Stevo Zigon and Radko Polic).

Interestingly enough, for some unspecified reasons such films were very popular in West Germany and it is not inconceivable that Roland Emmerich found much of the inspiration for *The Patriot* in them. This makes the attribution of an actual SS massacre in France 1944, to South Carolina 1781, more comprehensible. It also indicates just how little *The Patriot* has to do with American History.<sup>355</sup>

The SS massacre referred to is the reprisal destruction of the French village of Oradour-Sur-Gloane in August 1944, which included civilians being locked in the church and the church set on fire. In *The Patriot*, an identical action is depicted, committed by Loyalist troops led by a British officer, against American civilians. This was picked up almost at once by history-minded critics, and cited, especially in Britain, as an example of Hollywood excess.

Not picked up, but an even more telling example of the film's true derivation is a story told by Martin to explain his horror of war. After wiping out an Indian village, the American militia cut out the eyes of the dead, put them in a basket and left it as a warning. This was reportedly a common practice of the Ustashi, the Croatian fascist militia, Antulov's "home traitors", and appears in its best known form in Curzio Malaparte's memoir *Kaputt*.

While he spoke I gazed at a wicker basket on the Poglanik's desk. The lid was raised and the basket seemed to be filled with mussels, or shelled oysters—as they are occasionally displayed in the windows of Fortnum and Mason in Piccadilly in London. Casertano looked at me and winked, "Would you like a nice oyster stew?"

"Are they Dalmatian oysters?" I asked the Poglanik. Ante Pavelic removed the lid from the basket and revealed the mussels, that sticky and jelly-like mass, and he said smiling, with that tired good-natured smile of his, "It is a present from my loyal *ustashis*. Forty pounds of human eyes."<sup>356</sup>

The accuracy of Malaparte's reportage is in doubt,<sup>357</sup> but the story is part of the mythic folklore of the Partisan epic.

The "unspecified reasons" for their popularity in West Germany go a little deeper into film history and the psyche of moviegoers. At that time in West Germany, the only acceptable movies about the Second World War were antiwar. Films like *Die Brücke*, about a squad of young soldiers fighting to the death to defend a bridge—not having gotten the order to withdraw—pointed out the waste and futility of war.

Foreign filmmakers were under no such constraint, and it was a hallmark of the Partisan film that the German invaders were tough and stalwart, rolling aside their enemies in victory after victory until the last reel. There was even a sop to the "gentlemanly Wehrmacht officers." The decent regular soldiers are repulsed and disgusted by the actions of the SS and Gestapo and their collaborators in the Ustashi. The ultimate final defeat of the Wehrmacht, after their successful rampage, recalls the death of the gangster in any number

of American Gangster movies. He dies in the last five minutes, and justice is seen to be done, but not until he has been seen to have lived a life of violent, sensual adventure in the preceding hour-and-a-half.

It is Antulov's thesis that Roland Emmerich watched the Partisan films as a youth and young man in Germany and used elements from them to rewrite the original story for *The Patriot* into an American Revolutionary Partisan film. The thesis needs work and more examples from actual Partisan films, as well as a response from Emmerich himself before it can be called definitive, but the mere fact that it can be plausibly proposed is a kind of cultural watershed.

At one time Hollywood could be expected to have some basic respect for the fabric of American history and myth. If Indians were portrayed as savages, they were the savages of Puritan New England, or the captive narratives, or the reports from the western frontier. John Ford may have been less than truthful when he said that he based *My Darling Clementine* on his talks with Wyatt Earp, but at least he thought he had to lie, and he *had* known Earp. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* may be the most virulently dishonest of great films, but the titles are footnoted, he defended it all his life as history and a contemporary school of Southern historians, the "Redemptionists," would give it the veneer of respectability.

However, in 2000, it seemed possible for Hollywood to create an American Revolutionary epic based on a Yugoslavian genre, and no one noticed. The debate about the actual history soon was relegated to the academics in favor of the much noisier trans-Atlantic dispute. The historians were not biting: yes, the movie was a travesty, but yes, there were atrocities, just not these.

The field was left to writers with fewer qualifications and much greater fervor. Andrew Roberts represents the level of discussion in Britain; in America, the debate was

maintained by the Internet, with predictable results.

Therefore, it was not historians who went to northern Otsego County to see what the inhabitants had to say, but journalists. They asked direct questions to elicit pertinent responses, and got them.

The slaughter has lingered until the present day as one of the worst atrocities of the entire 1775-1781 Revolutionary War. Most of the killing was done by the Indians, who were allied to the British, and who had suffered similar attacks on their villages at the hands of the American army. But some of the English soldiers, according to local historian Sue Miller, dressed and painted themselves as Indian warriors. . . .

"You weren't nice, you weren't nice at all," Ms Miller said yesterday. "It was absolutely indiscriminate; babies, women, children were killed. It didn't really matter. To hack the parts off a woman and throw them - arms and legs - into a tree, that's not very nice. One of your most famous regulars did that here. It was gross. He was one of the most brutal men to serve in a British regiment."<sup>358</sup>

Sue said much the same to the American stringer, Chris Carola:

"I don't think we owe the Brits any apology whatsoever," said local historian Sue Miller, pointing out a spot where a family was killed and their cabin burned to the ground.<sup>359</sup>

Carola found a historian willing to be quoted:

Most of the killing was blamed on British loyalists and their Seneca Indian allies. But Capt. Kristian Marks, a military history instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, said about 50 English troops participated in the attack.

The British reporter, David Usbourne, talked to one closer by:

The massacre happened amidst a brutal four-year campaign in this area. British commanders, according to Wade Wells, a historian at the nearby Johnson Hall Historic Site, started the war using European warfare tactics of capturing and holding territory. But when the rebels simply upped and moved on each time, a new strategy had to be adopted - a campaign of widespread laying to waste.

"The British tried to destroy the rebels' ability to feed themselves and their army," said Mr Wells. "Barns were burned, cattle were carried off and killed, crops were destroyed." He added that it remains unclear whether Butler actually gave the order that no one was to be spared in Cherry Valley.

"Who knows what orders were given by Butler? Atrocities happen in all wars. But he was vilified at the time and written about in the newspapers for years afterwards," he said.

And both talked to Larry Thompson; Carola:

At Larry Thompson's barber shop in Cherry Valley, there's little inclination by the owner to placate British umbrage at ``The Patriot." His ancestors survived the 1778 battle after making it to the village fort, where they watched as the countryside went up in flames and their neighbors were killed.

``I'm not apologizing," Thompson said as he cut his brother's hair. ``If the British don't like the movie, they have to live with it."

And Usbourne:

One who feels no compunction about letting the English know how it really was - in this region, at least, if not in the Carolinas - is Larry Thompson. He owns the Cherry Creek barbershop and is a member of just five families remaining in town who were around at the time of the massacre.

"If they don't like it in England, they will have to get over it," he said. "I will not apologise for it and I don't think anyone else should apologise. I don't have anything against the English today, but just look at the accounts of what happened here and there was nothing humane about it."

Thomson later had an opinion (pro) on the East Hill Wind Farm.<sup>360</sup>

It is too much to expect a complex discussion about the nature of the frontier encounter in the New York Revolutionary backcountry in newspaper stories about an entertainment controversy. Nor is it very surprising that a forgotten episode of American history should be recalled in a half-hearted, utilitarian manner. It is merely poignant that a story with such resonance and such pathos should be recalled merely to validate so wretched an entertainment as *The Patriot*.

It is not hard to imagine the reaction of the authors and auteurs in this survey to *The Patriot*. In their own time, they might not have dared to burnish American legends with foreign guilt, if only because they could expect a critical response from the culturally alert

segment of the population. From academia, Allan Nevins' reaction would have been little different from David Hackett Fischer's, but there is no modern day equivalent of Frank Nugent writing for the popular press. Nugent thought it was important for Hollywood to do justice to Edmonds' recreation of history, and to do justice to the history itself. The movie critics who reviewed *The Patriot* seemed to regard its importance to its studio's bottom line and its place in Mel Gibson's career as its only significance. The effect of its success or failure as an issue in the flow of summer blockbusters weighed more heavily than any artistic or cultural merit it might have. *Cultural merit* is not merely the high measure of great art, but the placement of a thread, a meme, into the cultural marketplace, and the value of that thread in cultural life.

Within its genre of action blockbuster, artistic merit was usually a detriment. Gibson's fulfillment of his audience demographic's expectations was noted with approval within reviews written by critics who indicated no wish ever to see the picture a second time. Roger Ebert is a serious student of film and as close to a dean of American film criticism as is, but he wrote this:

"The Patriot" is a fable arguing the futility of pacifism, set against the backdrop of the Revolutionary War. It is rousing and entertaining, and you get your money's worth, but there isn't an idea in it that will stand up to thoughtful scrutiny.

These passages and others (including the Dead Man Who Is Not Really Dead) have been trucked directly into "The Patriot" from the warehouse of timeless clichés. They betray the movie's lack of serious intentions. It basically wants to be a summer action movie, with a historical gloss. At that, it succeeds. I enjoyed the strength and conviction of Gibson's performance, the sweep of the battle scenes, and the absurdity of the British caricatures. None of it has much to do with the historical reality of the Revolutionary War, but with such an enormous budget at risk, how could it?<sup>361</sup>

Ebert is well aware of Frank Nugent's body of work as critic and screenwriter, but he knows

that Nugent's battle is lost. Popular culture, when it becomes big business, is much too important to bother with even lip service to reality.

*The culture being done with the town, it was left to itself. The attention occasionally fastened onto it did and does little damage to the cultural life of the place, which seems largely unchanged since the Sesqui-Centennial of 1927, aside from the ease with which outsiders may intrude. The ones who stop are welcome; the ones who stay are tolerated. The local handyman invites the new people from New York to watch the moon landing in his cabin. The farmers would not mind the extra money that a windmill on their land would bring, to the distress of the summer folk. The wish of Jane Campbell that her sons may be left in peace seems to have been honored.*

*The greater change in the culture that gave birth to the dark legend that occurred between 1890 and 1940, and the culture since, seems to be permanent, and represents a cultural divorce. There is the local antiquarian who conserves the details of his own place or enthusiasm, and the academic more interested in meaning than in fact, and neither discipline pays much attention to the other. Sometimes an entertainment enterprise intrudes, driven almost entirely by ego and the bottom line, which excites comment from the antiquarians and the academics, which is reported incompetently by an indifferent press as controversy. The entertainers invoke their own Griffith-like attention to the right number of buttons on a sleeve as evidence of their good faith, and sometimes political controversialists appear to muddy the waters completely. Any recent film or television historical drama may serve as example.*

*In 1940 a novelist or screenwriter could make a reference to Walter Butler or Cherry Valley, or to the Iroquois or Tories, or even Benedict Arnold, and be sure that most of his intended audience would have at least an inkling of who or what he was referring to. That is not true today. As tempting as it is to blame the schools or universities, it is more accurate to say that once these things were in the common, popular culture of Americans. Now they are not. Why has that happened, and what is the meaning of that change?*

#### Part Four: Meanings and Patterns

For the people of Cherry Valley, the meaning of their story was simple. They had suffered annihilation and seen their homes destroyed and were themselves scattered. They returned from exile, rebuilt their homes and farms and restored their lives. The parallel to the Israelites was self-evident. Through passing generations, they retold their story and they tell it still.

Within their region, the story was another aspect to the ordeal that they alone, of all the country, had suffered in the War of Independence. For five years, they kept their communities together in the face of constant attacks. A disparate, polyglot people had united and won their liberty by their own efforts. Cherry Valley was an exemplar of that struggle and sacrifice—every community risked what they alone had suffered.

To the country, that struggle was more distant and less distinct. Something terrible had happened in the woods, something to do with Indians. Timothy Dwight and William Stone wrote to correct that misunderstanding; it was something to do with some, not most Indians, and as many others strove to avert it.

It was during Cherry Valley's centennial commemoration that Harold Frederic brought the matter into the popular culture. He unwittingly planted the seed for the romance of the New York Revolutionary frontier. His story of the poor but honest lad from the Mohawk who loves another above his station would be repeated as late as 1985<sup>362</sup>, and his use of Walter Butler as anti-hero would be seized upon by Robert W. Chambers, who embedded Butler into the popular cultural map. Butler then made appearances in Robert Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76*, plagiarized from Chambers, D.W. Griffith's *America*, scripted by Chambers, and was the subject of Howard Swiggett's *War Out of Niagara*, inspired by



Chambers.

At this point—1916, the year *The Spirit of '76* was filmed—that the retelling of the story passed from individual to group effort, and that the meaning was as much about that effort as the actual fact of what had happened. Frederic's literary ambition caused him to invest the character of Walter Butler with dramatic elements. Chambers' literary workmanship caused him to reuse and elaborate on that invented character he appropriated. Yet these were still individual efforts. Just as the early, homely annals could be called organic, arising from natural impulses to explain reality, so did Frederic's and (to a lesser extent) Chambers' embroidery arise from individual efforts at creation.

With Robert Goldstein comes mass effort, creating mass art. The story is a nail upon which is hung spectacle and melodrama, nearly all sham; all borrowed from other cultural efforts, which good or bad, arose from an individual impulse. The new mass culture demands that every element be strained through a filter that excludes anything to distract the paying audience from attaining its desired end of vague good feeling.

It is telling that all three of the historical pictures—Goldstein's, Griffith's, Zanuck's—try to achieve the same pleasing effect of happily resolved melodrama by ignoring or glossing over troubling historical realities and ambiguities. A hack like Chambers started with a story, and told it by using a formula. The mass creators started with a formula, and told it anew by finding a story to fit it. The result of that method is the cultural emptiness of *The Patriot*. John W. DeForest could complain about the female demographic that discouraged the sales of realistic historical fiction in 1879, but it did sell enough to justify its printing. The stakes for modern mass entertainment are much higher; as Roger Price put it, until EVERYBODY wants it, NOBODY gets it.

Walter Edmonds was able to buck the tide, but only by taking a radical, non-

commercial path. He spent far more time researching, writing and re-writing his novel than he could have justified financially. In that same time, he could have written two of the light, popular regional romances that had made his name, or a dozen or so short stories for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Any one of these, bought by Hollywood, would have brought in more money than a “difficult” long novel. He had no reasonable expectation that his novel would have had the career-defining critical and popular success that it enjoyed.

That popularity also indicates that a serious treatment of historical themes could succeed in the marketplace. The picture Zanuck adopted from it altered and simplified much of the serious, mature element that Edmonds worked so hard to include. In business terms, Zanuck and his team were the serious men of business, but their efforts now are judged by the degree to which they allowed creators like John Ford free rein to express themselves. Ford, not locked into “star” casting and Technicolor presentation, was able to work with sympathetic writers and actors to create *How Green Was My Valley* the following year. It earned the studio more money and more prestige than *Drums Along the Mohawk*, despite the fact that its stars were a second-tier leading man and a twenty-year-old ingénue who were playing support to a twelve-year-old boy, instead of *Drums*’ marquee headliners and Technicolor glamour.

Zanuck’s team would have thought itself justified by the mediocre business done by *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, a perfect example how of a literary original can be faithfully translated to the screen—indeed, improved by translation. The audience that accepted the original short story in the *Post* may have been a different audience to the one that went to the movies, but they might have come to the movies if the title had not been changed. Its business aside, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, while neatly ending the survey of literature, does little to help summarize or encapsulate the meaning of it all.

## Chapter Fifteen: Michael Kammen: *A Season of Youth*, 1978

To this point, all of the works studied have been, however derivative, original works. However much was borrowed from history or other authors, the resulting book or movie has some claim to originality, if only in selection or presentation. What follows now is a study of a scholarly work, a study of the many echoes of the Revolution upon American culture, and its findings, and a comparison with the present study of one particular echo.

### Generations

In 1978, Michael Kammen published *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination*, a study of the ongoing impact of the Revolution on American culture. He concludes that the most important themes that came down from the event were the model of the first generation of Americans, their perception and celebration by succeeding generations of artists, and the depiction of the Revolution as a unique rite of passage experienced by that same first generation.

Such a conclusion leaves little for those later generations to do but to protect their inheritance. “We can win no laurels in a War for Independence; earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all . . . but there remains to us a great duty of defence and preservation” Thus Daniel Webster in 1825, noted by Kammen.<sup>363</sup>

He quotes the North American Review’s essay on the first three volumes of George Bancroft’s *History of the American Revolution*: “One by one they totter and die, the remnants of that sturdy race in whose ears the drums yet beat, in whose eyes the colors stream, as they tell the children of their children the story of the Revolution, or its battles and its trials . . . those who fought the great battle—better, alas than we could fight it!”<sup>364</sup>—a pre-echo of the “greatest generation” sentiment that arose in the 1990’s from the children of the cohort that

fought the Second World War.

These sentiments seem to be present in the local and regional commemorations and accounts of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk frontier. From William Campbell's *Annals* to William Stone's *Life of Brant*—wrong side, right generation—through the *Pageant of Cherry Valley* enacted on the centennial of the village, we see the equivalents of the attempts to create a national synthesis of America's birth story; how a small place made its claim to be remembered.

Then the generation that remembered died out, and the generation that remembered them was fading. The actual memory was dead; what replaced it was something that had to be imagined.

Kammen retells a story Felix Frankfurter told from 1940. He was present at an embassy dinner and Henry Stimson was making the case for lend-lease to Britain and the Allies fighting Germany. He saw Senator Peter G. Gerry of Rhode Island, a direct descendant of Elbridge Gerry and an isolationist, bristling at Stimson's words. After the speech Frankfurter spoke to Gerry, comparing his own recent European origins to Gerry's pure Anglo-Saxon descent—yet Frankfurter was the advocate of aid to Britain, and Gerry the opponent. Gerry replied, "You see, you haven't got what I have—a memory of the red coats."<sup>365</sup>

Senator Gerry had no real memory of the red coats; Jane Campbell did. She was the person who saw her mother and her friends killed and her home destroyed by the King's men and their allies; she was the person who endured two years captivity with the Seneca. Yet she also related to her son the story of the decency of the people she met in the longhouse, and in Canada, some of whom wore red coats. The generation of the massacre, her generation, had also agreed to conceal the fact that some of them had been Tories, like

Katie Shankland, saved by Brant, or the martyred Wells family. Such differences meant little to those who had faced an overwhelming experience together, though on opposite sides of a political question.

That generation had passed, and the generation who knew them was passing, when the centennial of the massacre was marked by the dedication of the monument to the dead in 1878. Their memory was still alive then, and is alive now, but only in its home place, along with the memory of the soldiers who died trying to protect them. The same cemetery now holds the graves of the people who built the monument, and who wrote the pageants and books that remembered them.

It was about that time that another sort of memory came forth, Senator Gerry's memory, the memory that comes as inheritance, like Father's Chesterfield coat—not a thing for actual use, but something to put on for occasions—something not really your own. Kammen notes approvingly the higher, better uses from authors like Stephen Vincent Benét, and mentions the baser uses—the adventures and romances of people like Chambers—almost in passing.

Kammen dismisses the handful of movies about the Revolution in a couple of pages, noting their derivative nature. They are indeed based upon largely ephemeral best selling romances of their time, with little consciousness of the past and less lasting value. *Janice Meredith* was a romance produced by William Randolph Hearst for Marion Davies that came out at the same time as *America*. Griffith's willingness to cut a sequence showing Washington crossing the Delaware, to avoid stealing the thunder from a similar scene in *Janice Meredith*, was said to have resulted in favorable notices for *America* in the Hearst papers.<sup>366</sup> It is hard to summon up much respect for anything so crassly altered for commercial reasons, but the significant question of why a medium that has successfully infused some aspects of the

National Story into popular culture, has failed to do so with the Revolution, despite treatments by the two most famous directors in American cinema, is not raised.

Kammen's thesis—the Revolution as the rite of passage for a heroic young America as its predominant image—holds up well today, thirty years later. It is a short work, less than 300 pages of text, and while not an exhaustive survey of the field, it is more than enough to prove his point, while leaving points yet to be made. I found it full of interesting and useful examples, such as Kenneth Roberts' pique at his competition and his critics, but I read it at first from the index, only as a resource, lest his thesis become mine. Given his material and the scope of his study, he could find evidence for progress and forward movement. My study is more problematical.

Noting the paucity of good modern historical fiction, Kammen regretted that a certain popular novelist who had written Revolutionary biographies had not chosen the age for one of his novels. That novelist was Howard Swiggett, his imposture still safely buried in the footnotes of Barbara Graymont<sup>367</sup>. Kammen also supplies the outline of a novel planned by Stephen Crane, stopped by his death, apparently just in time: a New Jersey Colonel's progress, closer to *Henry Esmond* than Harold Frederic dared.

Yet it is interesting that Crane's novel in *outline* receives more attention from Kammen than Walter Edmonds' novel in *fact*. *Drums Along the Mohawk* is mentioned as the object of Kenneth Roberts' anger and little else. It is surprising in view of the novel's popularity and long print life, not to mention the major film adaptation. Edmonds was too polite to have left behind racy, quotable comments about his contemporaries, or exalted opinions of his own work. "I belong to no school, and my work is not 'serious'", he said in his biographical notice. He was in fact alive and living not far from Cornell, Michael Kammen's base at the time of writing. Kammen was free to ignore Edmonds' self-

deprecation and instead give weight to the praise of Allen Nevins, and allow Edmonds a larger place in his survey of popular fiction as a living maker of the tradition Kammen was tracing. That he did not may have had something to do with his own thesis.

Edmonds' novel is an *antiquarian* novel, full of the past but with almost no effort to find a wider meaning other than . . . *that a man must stand up to live.*<sup>368</sup> His story is ultimately pessimistic about the National Story. The Revolution is necessary in the Valley only to preserve threatened freedoms, freedoms still threatened, or dubiously protected, at the novel's end by the state and national government. Edmonds is a traditional, small government Republican. He trusts local initiatives more than impositions from a distant seat of power. In his novels, state or national imperatives usually result in mishap or disaster.

The national triumphs of the 1940's and 1950's were the decades in which Edmonds seemed to lose recognition of the country he had grown up in; his writing became grounded wholly in a regional past in which he seemed to feel more at home. These decades were also the years in which formed the national school that formed Kammen, beginning from regional writing about Colonial New York, into a national scholar. In that light what Edmonds *actually* wrote must have seemed less important than what Crane and Swiggett *could* have written.

### **Patterns**

One of the most basic innate human skills is the ability to recognize patterns, from which evolves the need to find them. Kammen studies the patterns by which authors and artists assigned meaning to the Revolution, and he imparts his own pattern on the survey. He is able to do so, given the scope of his study. This study's frame of reference is much smaller, and I must work with what I have; that is our difference. I must find meaning in Edmonds, Griffith and Ford, and in five books by Robert W. Chambers, all of whom

Kammen is free to ignore, and find my own pattern.

Which pattern seems to be this: Cherry Valley had its own private significance up until its centennial, at which time the remembrance and the thing remembered became one thing in that village. The past had been fully integrated into the living world of the place, and set into its proper place. Kammen's *rite of passage* for Cherry Valley would have been settlement, destruction and rebirth, and by 1878, no element was more important than another was. Moreover, the rebirth had been marked by a reintegration of the original fabric of the place. No one was less a victim, and no survivor and contributor to the rebirth of the village was counted less, for having been a Tory. The worst sufferers of the Massacre had been the Tories of the Wells family, and their only surviving child was treated as an icon of the village's sacrifice. Their triumph was not military victory or Butler's death, but the return to the ordinary destiny marked out for them in 1741.

The elements of the story that were chosen by the wider world from that span of time were the lurid acts of November 11-12 1778. All else was prelude and afterward. By that thesis, the village was settled for the sole purpose of being destroyed, and was restored to life only to serve as a reminder of its destruction. The captives and survivors were taken for granted or forgotten. Brant moved on to a wider stage and the respectability that comes from old age, portraiture and, in the United States at least, impotent exile. Only the thread of Walter Butler survived to emerge into the popular culture.

Harold Frederic started Butler's survival by assigning his name to a minor but vivid figure in the cast of his attempt at creating a great historical novel. That figure was taken up by Robert W. Chambers, who elaborated increasingly on that same fictitious figure in five popular novels, achieving a fictitious apotheosis in *The Reckoning*. These were the novels Robert Goldstein plagiarized to write the screenplay of *The Spirit of '76*. Goldstein's



faithfulness to his stolen source, atrocities and all, was his downfall; if Chambers knew he had been plagiarized, he kept silent, and when he and Griffith adopted the story for *America*, they were very careful to make Walter Butler a renegade rather than the loyal and obedient servant of the Crown that he was. The exciting villainy from the pages of Chambers was amplified by Lionel Barrymore's swaggering performance, and another step was taken to place Butler in the hierarchy of American historical melodrama.

That step was nearly completed by Howard Swiggett, who did not need Barrymore to make a greater impact than Chambers had already, upon a bright, impressionable youth. He had a precedent for his re-*icononnaissance*: the novels—*Arundel* and *Rabble in Arms*—of Kenneth Roberts that tried to put Benedict Arnold back into the American pantheon as a hero of courage and honest conviction. However, Roberts had some basis for this in the historical record as it was in 1929, just as Harold Murdock could return to the sources to write the true story of Lexington Green. Swiggett had only a vivid childhood impression and a willingness to undertake long hours of study to make the case for Butler. That what case that could be made, had already been made, by Ernest Cruikshank, eluded him. He seems to have wanted to write his own *novel by Robert W. Chambers*, an amalgamation of all the Butler parts in the five novels into one big novel, with footnotes.

There is no indication that Swiggett had any idea of what he was doing. Robert W. Chambers tried to warn him off (“ . . . hustling the angels . . .”), but Swiggett was so blind to what he was doing that he proudly quoted Chambers' warning in his acknowledgements, and continued to create his own work of fiction—more remarkable than any of his later, properly labeled novels. As well, it is more fluent and compelling than anything Chambers wrote.

It was his later novels, best-sellers about business, which Kammen noted as an

indication that Swiggett should have written a novel about the Revolution, noting his biographies of Butler and other Revolutionary figures as a mark of interest. He thinks that Swiggett held back because of his deep sympathies with Britain, which he showed by participating in various British aid organizations during the Second World War. This is true, and *War Out of Niagara* shows many of those same sympathies—Butler’s oft-indicated desire to go to London on leave, his deep pride in his Anglo-Irish ancestry—both not present in any surviving letters or reports of Butler’s, but created by Frederic and heavily elaborated upon by Chambers. As in his notes about Crane’s planned novel, Kammen here discusses an unwritten book, and one even more non-existent than Crane’s; there is no sign that Swiggett ever contemplated a novel about the Revolution.

Yet these works are discussed at more length than Chambers’ novels, or Edmonds’ or either of the two major movies adopted from them. Whatever the merit of these novels and movies, their footprint in their contemporary popular culture is large, and today *Drums Along the Mohawk*, book and film, are readily available, as they were in 1978.

However, they do not fit the *pattern* that Kammen has come to recognize. Kenneth Roberts does—so Anglophile that he could write a best-seller about an American Loyalist, *Oliver Wiswell*, placing him squarely in an American tradition of conservatism and fair play inherited from England. Roberts is treated and quoted at length—his waspish asides about his rivals do not hurt the narrative either.

Kammen is not alone in seeking patterns. Edward Countryman and John O’Connor, in their essays on the film of *Drums Along the Mohawk*, seek to place it in the wider context of its time. They note that war was looming in 1940-41, and that alliance with Britain was desirable. Countryman also notes that Edmonds’ vision of individual communities standing up for themselves, after being abandoned by the state and nation, is replaced by the

filmmakers' threatened communities being rescued by the state and seamlessly integrated into the national fabric. This is said to be the movie industry's commitment to creating a positive national story. That it may be the industry's commitment to substituting a triumphal ending for the darkly realistic ending of the novel is also true, but it does not fit their pattern.

Patterns exist, but it is one of the quirks of human nature that we see patterns when they are not there. The "man's face on Mars" is nothing more than random shadows on rocks, but even the prepared eye is startled to see it. The patterns found by Kammen, Countryman and O'Brian are valid theories given the evidence, but the more evidence brought to the case, the more the pattern fades. Edmonds' novel does not fit Kammen's pattern of Anglo-American amity. Griffith's *America*, which foreshadows Zanuck's/Ford's *Drums Along the Mohawk* in corresponding points of contrivance and banality, suggests that the filmmakers had no more important points to make than those denoting profit. *The Howards of Virginia*, a forgotten Revolutionary epic of 1941 with similar friendly things to say about the British, suggests that the most important thing they all had in common was awareness of the money to be made by not antagonizing the British Commonwealth market.

Edmonds restored truth to the thread by bringing the supporting players, the rustics and the victims, to the foreground. He went back to the sources and established finally—as finally as the culture will allow—that the great and high counted for little or nothing compared to the will and resolution of the people. Edmonds did his research well enough that the historians agreed with him. In doing so, he wrote himself out of the pattern created or followed by previous writers, local and national, like Frederic, Crane, Swiggett and Roberts. An exception that tests the rule, he must be dealt with in his own section, or made to fit the pattern, or ignored.

His earlier optimistic novels about the rustic life of upstate New York a hundred

years ago do not prepare the reader for the depth and darkness of his novel about the ordeal of the Mohawk Valley farmers in the Revolution. The darkness was not in his nature. His articles and interviews convey a calm, friendly man without rancor to anyone save the vandals who cut a thruway through his valley. The darkness arose from his research into what happened to those farmers and his attempt to report honestly what that meant in human terms. Like one of those farmers, he cleared the brush that had grown over the original ground for forty years and revealed what lay beneath. He used the mundane works of the chroniclers, the archival reports, like a good historian. Kammen cites Anthony Burgess's remark that a historical novelist is a historian with a talent for writing fiction<sup>369</sup>; this Edmonds did; as Allan Nevins noted, his storytelling is not as strong as his historical sense of time and place.

Edmonds may have written himself out on this book, or he may have found himself into an age that he did not recognize. Stephen Vincent Benet died in 1943, perhaps before he noticed a change as momentous as the one he noted at the end of *John Brown's Body*:

If you at last must have a word to say,  
Say neither, in their way,  
"It is a deadly magic and accursed,"  
Nor "It is blest," but only "It is here."<sup>370</sup>

When Edmonds wrote about the war of his own time, it was as the author of the Army Air Force's history of the defeat in the Far East, *They Fought With What They Had*—an apt subtitle for his novel about the war in the Mohawk Valley. Outnumbered men, cut off from home, fight in vain against an implacable enemy. The history ended in July 1942, with nothing about the triumphant, imperial return to the Philippines. Edmonds seemed to want to record the heroes of a heroic defeat before they were obscured by the fanfare of American triumphalism, that new, alien note he may not have recognized as American.

In much the same manner John Ford returned from the war to Hollywood to make *They Were Expendable*, a deeply felt movie memorializing the losing fight of Navy men in the Philippines' defeat. He made it with the navy's blessing, to inspire the liberation of the Philippines. Released in 1945, the picture did ordinary business; the audience was tired of war and preferred victory.

That neo-imperial triumph coincided with the end of the popular cultural strain of Cherry Valley. The memory of the victims in a regional struggle, pawns in a war of great powers, was an impediment to a superpower. The same war finished the strain of Walter Butler in the popular culture. By 1945, a massacre that involved a few dozens was hardly to be noticed. The novels of Roberts and Edmonds would continue to sell in reprint and paperback, but not in their old numbers, and sold as escapism, without modern relevance.

Aside from third-rate historical potboilers, the Revolution did not receive much attention until the Bicentennial. This time, scholars like Kammen awaited the rush, prepared to apply their methods on the phenomenon as it was being born, but there was little to see, and what there was nearly wilted under the weight of so much attention. The pulp historical romances of John Jakes, one of the heirs of Robert W. Chambers, are noted by Kammen. They and their television adaptations had no artistic merit or historical value; yet again, they are the recipients of more attention than Edmonds' work.

Little of that slight spate of 1976 remains in the popular culture, and even the scholarly journal articles themselves are beginning to disappear into digital obscurity. There seems to be no continuing interaction with the Revolution in the popular culture, only its invocation in the service of increasingly untenable analogies of various religious and cultural controversies, though one of the earliest, the attempts in the 1960's to liken North Vietnamese Stalinists to American Whigs, is still the hardest to surpass.

Michael Kammen, his study and examples, represents a useful control for comparison to this study. His conclusions are stronger, grounded as they are in more examples over a longer span of time. He reports comprehensively on the strains of art and literature that Americans created to memorialize and understand the events that gave birth to their nation. That wealth of works allows him to ignore the problem of Cherry Valley. That problem is a flow of history, art and literature concurrent with his own study. It results in the question of how it happened that when the two great masters of American cinema happened to make movies about the American Revolution that those movies were about a relative backwater, devoid of urban masses, political violence and political eloquence. As well, there was a lost third epic movie, *The Spirit of '76*, also set in that backwater. How was it that the popular culture returned to the themes embodied in the matter of Cherry Valley, in the form of three costly mass entertainments, in a span of less than twenty-five years?

Michael Kammen may have concluded that the story of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk Valley was a frontier story, and not about the Revolution, and that the experience of those people was singular and isolated, even extreme, given the duration and savagery of their war. He may be right. In that case, the question remains of how it became so much a part of the national story, and what that question says about that story.

## Chapter Sixteen: Conclusions

On 11-12 November 1778, Iroquois and Loyalist Rangers raided the hamlet of Cherry Valley on the New York frontier, south of the Mohawk Valley. The raid destroyed the settlement and forced the evacuation of the fort. Forty people died, most of them unarmed civilians.

For 162 years, the echoes of that episode resounded waywardly through American history and popular culture, and then fell silent. The point of the preceding essay has been to chart the rise and fall of that serpentine resonance. The point of the present essay is to ask the reason why.

### Summary and Significance

A strand in popular culture may be traced from its greatest significance forward and backward to its birth and to its death. This answers the question of significance: *See how important this is/was!* The chronological tracing of a strand shows how a minor theme can assume greater significance, even if it were merely commercial, accidental or off-hand; mere volume alone can make it important. It is there, a presence, and the explanation for it being there may signify more than its actual being.

There is nothing as materially significant in the strand of Cherry Valley as occurred at its birth. Hundreds of men descended on a peaceful village, destroyed nearly all of it, killed soldiers and civilians and left, their force almost unharmed. The survivors withdrew and scavengers completed the destruction of the settlement. When the survivors returned at war's end the only thing not in ruins was the burial ground.

They resettled and in later years, told their stories. Many of those stories died with the tellers, but a few set the stories down and preserved them as memorials. They are mostly about death, recording the deaths of their neighbors and kin, and how some were able to

avoid death, and how some lived under the threat of death in captivity. They are stories of civic and human virtue, and the human virtue is not limited to their immediate friends and neighbors. The humanity of Joseph Brant on the day of the raid is preserved, as is the humanity of the Seneca with whom Jane Campbell spent her captivity. These early accounts are similar to those saved by other chroniclers, and all seem to have survived by chance or the foresight or filial piety of a few. William Campbell published the account of his mother and his neighbors. By the time he did, most of the resentment from the war and the taking of sides had faded from Cherry Valley, but not from the country, so the Loyalist politics of the Wells family was underplayed, and that of the Shanklands was elided.

The accounts ranged from the local and the recent, like Campbell's, to later and farther. From the Mohawk Valley William Stone wrote his biography of Joseph Brant. It did not come from Canada or the Mohawk, perhaps because Brant was yet a controversial figure due to his roles in tribal and provincial disputes. In America he was a part of the past. Except as a visitor, his part in American history ended in 1783 and no American minded his career in Upper Canada.

Samuel Kirkland, through Timothy Dwight, urged the claims of the Oneida and the Patriot Iroquois to national attention as well, but Brant had more resonance. He was an individual who had moved among the great in the United States and Great Britain, and had fought with a mercy rare to the frontier; he was also safely in the past and in another country. Unlike the Oneida, he had no claims for lands or grievances to be redressed by an American legislature.

The chroniclers, among whom the "gossip" Jephtha Simms seems preeminent, also concerned themselves with heroic or suffering individuals against the backdrop of frontier war. Like Campbell, Stone and Kirkland they cataloged the heroism and claims of individuals



or small communities. Even Ernest Cruikshank's monograph on Walter Butler, 100 years after the fact, had the same purpose: to bring forth or retrieve the individual claims to attention of the honored dead.

They had no higher purpose than memory. The stories all ended in the unspoken hope that the sufferings and strivings of these people had furthered the cause of national progress, never doubting that the future always brings progress. No one doubted the right of the settlers to clear and cultivate the wilderness, or the right of the Iroquois to resist them, or the right of the Loyalists to place a limit on political progress. All worked in the light they were given to see, the true light belonging to the winners. This cataloging of the past for its own sake, without a deep searching of the implications of the acts of heroes, would come to be called antiquarianism. Later historians, trying to impose larger meanings on these events, would use the word as a pejorative, but without that catalogue of facts, larger meanings would not have a basis.

### **The Foundry of Memory**

These realities, however apparent to authors mining the actual source documents of the time, escaped most of the second wave of authors and artists treating the matter of Cherry Valley and the Mohawk frontier. This wave coincided almost exactly with the centennial of the massacre, and in one case, may have directly been inspired by it.

The most important of these authors is Harold Frederic. *In The Valley* set the tone for much of the succeeding works, not so much for the quality of the attempt at a great historical novel, as it was due to the indolence of succeeding writers. In his zeal to copy the formula that had worked so well in *Henry Esmond* Frederic created gentry in the Mohawk that never really existed. Moreover, he did not copy the deep psychological insights that Thackeray employed in his characterization of Esmond.

Douw Mauverensen is an admirer of men and women as pallid and passive as he; he tries to live up to ideals of gentlefolk who never existed. Such a character can be worthy of a novelist's attention, and Frederic would know much greater success with such a contemporary anti-hero in *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. In that book he was able to create a genuine character-driven narrative. He failed to do so with *In The Valley* because he was too confined by the limits of the historical genre as it existed in 1880, and because he was not Thackeray. It is an honest failure, however; honest in that Frederic is writing at best he can, about a matter that he respects and wants to bring to a wider audience.

As so often happens in romantic historical fiction, the villain gets all the good lines. The nominal antagonist, Phillip Cross, is a snobbish cad, but must retain some surface power to please in order to make his successful wooing of the virtuous heroine plausible. Frederic's Walter Butler has no such burden to bear, and be as repellently attractive as his author can make him. He makes a dashing appearance, spouts murderous invective against the rebels and departs before he becomes boring. This appearance marks the first use in fiction of Butler as reactionary anti-hero. This characterization has little grounding in the facts of Butler's biography or his letters. The Butler of Mohawk Valley tradition is little more than a snarling villain. Frederic adds depth to this villain by making him a frontier squireen whose charm masks a ruthless killer. While this may come from the already current tradition of the Southern faux cavalier, the attractive reactionary, it may come as well from Frederic's model, the genuine cavaliers portrayed in *Henry Esmond*.

Frederic, through intention or inexperience, was unable to make his hero as vivid or attractive. Douw, like the flora of Jefferson's "Notes on Virginia," is the native growth that thrives on a richer soil than the European hybrids he displaces, and travels between civilized and frontier worlds with ease. His character bears the burden of that metaphor and must

always represent—rather than be—something, just as Phillip Cross and Daisy represent. Only Walter Butler gets to be himself, and leaves such a vivid impression that Frederic had to bring him back in the epilogue, mentioning his dark career and death, lest the readers think he might still be out waiting in the woods.

In his secondary object, the memorial to the settlers of the Mohawk Valley frontier, Frederic hits all of his marks, since his ambition is more limited. Here he need only enumerate the people and settlements that sent their men to Oriskany and then describe the battle. A shorter description of that battle than his can not fail to impress the reader with the courage and sacrifice of the militia. That it is a truncated description of the campaign, from struggle to victory, leaving the story of the terrible four years aftermath to an epilogue, allows Frederic to fulfill the conventions of what passed for historical romance in 1880; it is enough victory that Daisy is finally matched with Douw.

*In The Valley* had a minor success and today, if not in print, survives in *.txt*. Anyone may download the novel free, the minor novel of a regional novelist known for better work. Frederic did not so much fail as aim short; trusting Thackeray's gift rather than his own. .

Frederic was actually present in 1878 when the citizens of Cherry Valley consecrated their own memorials. Their work was easier since they had no metaphors; their memorials lay on actual bones. They were not making a demand upon the greater world to be honored for the sacrifice of their village, but keeping their promise to the dead to remember them. The experience of the Civil War had deepened the knowledge that their village was renowned for the depth of its sacrifice, and that sacrifice could be honored best by the kindred who had survived. When Larry Thompson spoke to the reporters in 2000, he was identified as a member of one of the five families that had lived in Cherry Valley since 1778. Two hundred years have passed, and they all still know who they are. Their memorials in

stone, paper and performance are all of a piece: homely, unadorned and clothed by living memory. The same can not be said of what the outsiders have made.

It is hard to call Robert W. Chambers gifted, in anything other than a commercial or personal sense. He wrote nothing that survived or deserved to. His mastery was of the contemporary popular culture—serious critics spoke of the “problem” of Robert W. Chambers, as though his body of work was something that needed to be solved, and not read. Leaving no record of his own, it was for Swiggett to cite the influence of Harold Frederic’s *In The Valley* on Chambers’ output: the five romances set on the New York Revolutionary frontier. These are very much Thackeray taken at third hand, the bare synopsis of a good novel further stripped of psychological insight and fleshed out with romantic clichés. All five partake of Frederic’s basic outline of middle or upper crust lovers separated by war and society and reunited by the same, despite the best efforts of formulaic villainy. His heroes are all variations on Douw, but British, his heroines all Daisys with more pride and airs, his villains—literally—Walter Butler.

It is the vivid and dramatic adaptation of Frederic’s Butler that gives the novels their distinction. Like a rising star in rep, Butler is elevated in each novel until *The Reckoning*, in which he enjoys the role of prime mover and anti-hero. Like Raymond Chandler and his man with a gun, Chambers seemed to relieve ennui or too much love-making by having Walter Butler come through the door.

Through his novels and his screenplay for Griffith’s *America*, Chambers almost single-handedly placed the regional historical figure of Walter Butler on the popular cultural map. Butler’s only previous fame was as the agent, however passive, of the Cherry Valley massacre. He was a minor actor in an almost forgotten local episode. Chambers revived his name, put it on a fictional character and made it a byword for three decades. This was

something that no previous author had done or could have done; only in Cherry Valley and the Mohawk Valley was Butler's name recalled; only Chambers had the industry or the knowledge. This was not the action of devoted descendants of victims or historians. This was the work of a hack.

Chambers would inspire Howard Swiggett to write his *biography of an imaginary man*. Walter D. Edmonds would write his own novel, almost in response to Chambers and Swiggett in tone, for a market primed to historical fiction by Chambers and his successors. Benet drew Walter Butler's name from the air in which Chambers had placed it. Chambers is the linchpin on which the brief fame of Walter Butler turns.

If he had chosen to write about Joseph Brant or the community of Cherry Valley as well, they would not have enjoyed similar fame. They were too real for romance. Brant enjoyed the career, fame and talent ascribed to Butler by Chambers, but he also enjoyed a long and prosaic postwar career as a political player in Upper Canada. The people of Cherry Valley earned their fame for suffering, endurance and peaceful rebirth; none of them were around when Butler had his scalp lifted. Despite their deeper significance, these qualities are not the ingredients of drama and romance.

Yet that drama was there, and recalled to memory by Walter Edmunds. Just as Chambers had single-handedly put the imbalance in place, Edmunds restored it, using the stories left for him by the antiquarians, materials ignored by the historians looking for more significant themes. Edmunds deemed them worthy enough for a small scale human epic of endurance, willfully written without mention of great men or movements. He used his talent—literally, since he was never again to write a major novel—to rescue the Valley people and their war from obscurity. What resonance that struggle now has in the greater mass culture is based almost entirely on the fading cultural footprint left from Edmunds'

bestseller.

The moving pictures based upon the works from this strand— *The Spirit of '76* and Griffith's *America*, both based on Chambers' *The Reckoning*; Ford's *Drums Along The Mohawk*—simplified and more attuned for mass consumption, have had more impact as entertainments than cultural events. Goldstein's *The Spirit of '76* can not be judged since all prints of it are lost, but the script outline provided by Goldstein and the few stills offer little more than empty spectacle, one still picture showing a passing resemblance to surviving images of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The picture's derivation, the apparent wholesale plagiarism of the novels of Robert W. Chambers, promises no more.

Yet Goldstein prefigures succeeding picture-makers from Griffith to Ford to Mel Gibson. Each mined the source material to find matter for their spectacle, and to create a veneer of historical respectability for their melodrama. They are all out to *make a show*, as Zanuck's yes-man said, and what makes the story unique is ignored, or in the case of Zanuck and Ford's picture, discarded.

Griffith's picture was an expensive flop, so little regarded that the commercial videotape released in the 1980's had two reels in the wrong order. There is little to be said for it artistically, aside from Barrymore's performance and some of the *mise en scène*. John Ford's *Drums Along The Mohawk* did make money, but had little more importance than that, despite the irony of having two of the greatest living artists in America—director John Ford and script doctor William Faulkner—working behind the camera. The talent in front of the camera was major as well, but their reputations are also based on their work elsewhere.

### **Pattern and Meaning**

When I began my survey of the literature, I did so looking for the pattern that would reveal the meaning, the reason this cultural thread survived and vanished. As my survey

continued I began to doubt that any such thread existed. It seemed that the facts and ideas kept alive organically, by the memory of people close to the event, had been picked up by other people simply looking for raw material to make their own artifice. Like a weathered barn whose lumber is stripped to outfit a new house with a spurious patina of venerable age, a serviceable structure had been looted, repeatedly, by vandals in search of a certain respectable veneer to cover a flimsy, temporary structure.

Not having Michael Kammen's broad palette, the few materials I had for study left me with the realization that the survival of the story of Cherry Valley past its centennial, and its rebirth in the popular culture was due almost entirely to a series of random occurrences. A good novelist (Frederic), borrowing his characterization and theme from a great novelist (Thackeray), writes a mediocre first novel. A bad novelist (Chambers) borrows heavily from that novel. That bad novelist's output is plagiarized (by Goldstein) to furnish the plot of a bad movie but a good cause celebre, and then used properly, to furnish the plot for the poor movie of a great director (Griffith). Then an amateur historian (Swiggett) finds in the bad novelist's work the inspiration for a spurious work of popular history that comes closest of all to degrading the honest facts of a frontier tragedy into the novel-with-footnotes of an obsessed fan. The perfect metaphor for the degradation that occurs when history and memory are co-opted in the service of commercial popular culture is the story of the reporters who came to Cherry Valley in 2001 to use its real history as a sidebar to support a travesty that was *The Patriot*.

Yet a vestige of the barn remained. After nearly half a century of its being stripped, Edmonds could still find in it the elements for the one great novel in him. He and Benét could see the emptiness that lay in the ambitions of Great Men. They ended the meme began by Frederic and carried forward by Chambers and Swiggett and showed Butler not as a

villain but a fool. Benét had written him as the bold Ranger in 1938, but by 1941, he rewrote him into a sad old man. There the story ended as far as popular culture was concerned, for once with the truth in place, but not placed by direction from the culture at large. A raft of drifting twigs in a stream is stopped and blocked by another mere twig that happens to stop just crossways enough to make a dam. Nothing was learned, no moral imposed, by purpose; only a series of lucky and unlucky chances.

That would be the literal, particular meaning. What it may imply about tradition and the popular culture may be a little more dismaying. How much of what we think of as the bedrock of our culture is similarly the result of chance and drift? How much meaning has been imposed upon random episodes linked by only coincidence and the strong desire to find a pattern within chaos? Exactly what do we evoke when we speak of American traditions, or the American Grain? Who are the people we call forefathers, and who has put them in their place, and how permanent is it—and how much should we regret their eventual, inevitable replacement?

I have strived to find meaning in this story, and the strongest meanings I can find are some annals of American Enthusiasm and Ambition, arising almost purely by chance: a story of some individuals who happened across the matter of Cherry Valley, and used various threads of it to create individual works belonging to varying forms of art.

One fact is certain. The quality and merit of these works is in direct proportion to their fidelity to the historical record. The annals created by the participants and their posterity are valuable exactly because of their honesty. The works drawn from those annals have value to the degree that they respect that honesty. Walter Edmonds lacked Harold Frederic's artistic ambitions. Though more distant in time from the events than Frederic, he was more faithful to his sources, and wrote a better book. Howard Swiggett bowed to



Robert W. Chambers in all things, yet his book excels Chambers' whenever he quotes at length the source documents he uncovered.

There is also the fact that Cherry Valley exists. The annals and commemorations borrowed to create the artistic elaboration of the matter of Cherry Valley played a role in the growth and maintenance of an actual community. Long after Walter Butler made his last appearance in the culture, a mute face in a jury box, the story of the place he tried so hard to eradicate continued, and left its own mark, however slight, upon the culture. The works created by the people of Cherry Valley are a commentary on the works created by the inhabitants of the culture; they are a control, a point of comparison, a standard measure to recognize anomalies or exaggerations in the culture. This was never so evident than in 2000, when the reporters visited Cherry Valley to ask people about *The Patriot*, oblivious to the actual frontier epic that they were trying to use to corroborate a summer blockbuster.

Far more subtle was the contrast between Griffith's *America* of 1924 and the *Pageant* of 1927. The homely play, written and acted by the people, for the people, of Cherry Valley, has a naïve charm and native sense that the overblown movie epic lacks. The note of rueful amused resignation to life in a passed over backwater, penned by a committee in a library, could have been written by Garrison Keillor.

These works have a tenuous connection in time and location. One may only find them grouped together in a computer generated subject or keyword search, or on a shelf in a carrel. Their commonality extends to only one thing: they all served to keep a single memory alive. In some cases, that was not the author's deliberate intent. Harold Frederic could not have known his ambitious novel would give birth to Robert W. Chambers' potboilers. Chambers, decent chap that he was, wrote novels that led Robert M. Goldstein to a prison cell, and his friend D.W. Griffith to failure, yet they also may have led Walter Edmunds to

write his novel as well.

Nevertheless, they all preserved the memory of Cherry Valley. They all created their own monuments that recalled the past to life, or at least preserved memory to find. They created *triggers*, devices capable of releasing the process of memory. Memory is the fundamental element of the story of Cherry Valley. That story now comprises more than the history of the village and its people; it now includes the authors and artists who used that history to recall the heroic past or to make a show, or to keep the pot boiling. It is now the story of the captive Jane Campbell and the captive Robert Goldstein, the ambitious Walter Butler and the ambitious Harold Frederic, the honorable Joseph Brant and the honorable Walter Edmonds. If there is no great meaningful pattern to be found, if there is only a body of memory, that memory merits this chronicle.

By now, the village is more memory than wood and stone. The memorials that recall its story, or were inspired by it, are of stone and paper, canvas and celluloid. None of these is stronger or more substantial than memory. None of them would exist had not those who experienced it or survived it kept it alive in their hearts and passed it on until someone finally wrote it down, on paper or in stone. But it is not the media that carries it, nor the availability of that media, that measures the force or strength of that memory. The living force of memory is the resonance it makes upon the heart. In that sense, the first instance of memory recorded herein is still the deepest. Nothing written, nothing filmed of Cherry Valley may resound so long and deep as the stitches on Jane Wells' cap.

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- 123 - 129 *The Spirit of '76*, Production stills  
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- 156 - 161 *America*, Screen Captures  
*America* Dir. D.W. Griffith D.W. Griffith Inc., 1924 Image Entertainment DVD 1998
- 171 - 2 Cherry Valley Turnpike, Cherry Valley Sesqui-centennial Pageant  
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- 234 - 235 *Drums Along the Mohawk*, Book Cover  
<http://www.librarything.com/work/6847>
- 245 Screen Capture, *My Darling Clementine*  
*My Darling Clementine* Dir. John Ford 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1946 Fox Studio Classics DVD 2004, Prerelease version
- 253 Newspaper ad *Drums Along the Mohawk*  
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- 254 - 260      Screen Captures, *Drums Along the Mohawk*  
*Drums Along the Mohawk* 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox DVD 2005
- 281              Screen Capture *The Devil And Daniel Webster*  
*The Devil And Daniel Webster* Dir. William Dieterle RKO 1941. Criterion  
DVD 2003
- 282-3           Posters *The Devil And Daniel Webster* Upper:  
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## Appendix 1: The Published Works of Robert W. Chambers

### Novels and Short Story Collections

- |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |      |                                                                            |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1894 | In the Quarter                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 1909 | Hide and Seek in Forest Land<br>Special Messenger                          |
| 1895 | The King in Yellow and Other<br>Horror Stories                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |      | The Danger Mark                                                            |
|      | The Red Republic: A Romance of<br>the Commune                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1910 | Ailsa Paige<br>The Green Mouse                                             |
| 1896 | The Maker of Moons<br>With the Band                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 1911 | The Common Law<br>The Adventures of a Modest Man<br>Daughter of Revolution |
| 1897 | The Mystery of Choice<br>A King and a Few Dukes<br>Lorraine                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |      | Lords of Creation<br>Pro Bono Publico                                      |
|      | D. Osborne, Writer of Romance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1912 | Blue-Bird Weather<br>Japonette<br>The Streets of Ascalon                   |
| 1898 | The Haunts of Men<br>Ashes of Empire                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1913 | The Gay Rebellion<br>The Business of Life                                  |
| 1899 | The Cambric Mask: A Romance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1914 | Anne's Bridge<br>Between Friends<br>Quick Action<br>The Hidden Children    |
| 1901 | Cardigan                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |      |                                                                            |
| 1902 | The Maid-At-Arms<br>Outdoorland<br>Maids of Paradise                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1915 | Athalie<br>Who Goes There!<br>Police!!!                                    |
| 1903 | Orchard-land                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1916 | The Better Man<br>The Girl Philippa<br>Play Girl in Fiction                |
| 1904 | A Young Man in a Hurry and Other<br>Short Stories<br>In Search of the Unknown<br>Shot Out<br>Curiosities of Angling<br>Fished Out<br>Fly-Fishing<br>Point Shooting<br>Poor Sport Made Better<br>Semi-Tropical Shooting<br>Stag And Roebuck<br>Trout and Grayling in Bavaria | 1917 | The Dark Star                                                              |
|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1918 | The Laughing Girl<br>The Restless Sex<br>My Woman Types                    |
| 1905 | The Reckoning<br>Forest-Land<br>Iole                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1919 | The Crimson Tide<br>The Moonlit Way<br>In Secret                           |
| 1906 | The Tracer of Lost Persons<br>The Fighting Chance<br>Mountain-Land                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1920 | The Slayer of Souls<br>A Story of Primitive Love                           |
| 1907 | The Tree of Heaven<br>Garden-Land<br>The Younger Set                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1921 | The Little Red Foot                                                        |
|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1922 | The Flaming Jewel<br>Eris                                                  |
| 1908 | The Firing Line<br>Some Ladies in Haste                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1923 | The Hi-jackers<br>The Talkers                                              |
|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1924 | America: or, The Sacrifice<br>The Girl in Golden Rags                      |
|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1925 | The Mystery Lady                                                           |
|      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1926 | The Man They Hanged                                                        |

1927 The Drums of Aulone  
 1928 The Rogue's Moon  
       The Sun Hawk  
 1929 The Happy Parrot  
       The Rake and the Hussy  
 1930 Beating Wings  
       The Painted Minx  
 1931 Gitana  
       War Paint and Rouge  
 1932 Whistling Cat

1933 Whatever Love Is  
 1934 Secret Service Operator 13  
       The Young Man's Girl  
 1935 Love and the Lieutenant  
       The Gold Chase  
 1937 Marie Halkett  
       The Fifth Horseman  
 1938 Smoke of Battle

### **Movie adaptations**

The Fighting Chance (1916)  
 The Girl Philippa (1916) (novel My  
 Girl Philippa)  
 The Common Law (1916)  
 Who Goes There? (1917)  
 The Fettered Woman (1917) (novel  
 Anne's Bridge)  
 The Hidden Children (1917)  
 The Girl of Today (1918)  
 The Danger Mark (1918)  
 The Business of Life (1918)  
 The Woman Between Friends (1918)  
 (novel Between Friends)  
 The Black Secret (1919) (story In  
 Secret)

The Dark Star (1919)  
 The Firing Line (1919)  
 The Cambric Mask (1919)  
 Unseen Forces (1920) (novel Athalie)  
 The Song of the Soul (1920) (titles)  
 The Restless Sex (1920)  
 The Fighting Chance (1920)  
 Even as Eve (1920) (novel The Shining Band)  
 Cardigan (1922)  
 The Common Law (1923)  
 Between Friends (1924)  
 America (1924)  
 The Common Law (1931)  
 Operator 13 (1934) (stories Secret Service  
 Operator 13)

## Appendix 2: *America, or The Sacrifice*

*A play by Robert W. Chambers*

*Place: Mamaroneck.*

*Scene: The Studio at Orienta Point.*

*Time: Any hour.*

*Amid great noise and confusion, 16 sets are being built, ten of them gold-plated. Sound of hammering and a cat fight. Several heavy objects fall with sickening crashes.*

*Enter D. W., strewing cigarette butts.*

D.W.: This is very quiet and peaceful after the incessant conversation of Mr. Chambers. I left him eating. He eats his head off. I hope to God they dock his royalties. [Strides to and fro smoking several dozen cigarettes. Presently bursts into song in a rich, resonant voice just off the key.]

*Enter Cap'n Pell, hurriedly.*

PELL: Sire! A snowstorm is approaching Mamaroneck!

D.W.: How do you know?

PELL: I heard the siren's awful voice warning us of the coming storm!

D.W. [much pleased ]: That was my voice. [A majestic silence. ] Mr. Pell!

PELL: Sire!

D.W.: Be kind enough to find out for me how many buttons Sam Adams wore on his underwear.

PELL: Immediately, sire. Do you mean his winter underwear?

D.W.: Both. I am always thorough. Also find out if Sam Adams burst off any buttons on the Nineteenth of April. You can't tell what fright will do to a man's underwear. Where's Blondy?

PELL: Gold plating the Woolworth Building.

D.W.: But the Woolworth Building wasn't built in 1776!

PELL: No, sire, but you are so thorough, he thought you might like to have it handy. And Chambers may die. Your chauffeur may kill him, vet.

D.W.: 'Tis well, faithful, trusty Blondy! [Bursts into song: ] My Blondy, I admire him much,/Much more than Chambers, Pell, and Such....

PELL: Sire!

D.W.: [kindly]: I know. You think my voice resonant and beautiful. Mr. Pell, it is the great sorrow of my life that I am known only as a movie director and not as a vocalist. [Fumbles in his pockets. ] My God! I had 200 cigarettes an hour ago! Send somebody for 200 more!

*Enter Blondy.*

BLONDY: Say, what the hell, Mr. Griffith—you set three sets afire with cigarette butts, and two of the cats are in flames. J.H.C.! [Joseph H. Choate.] Why the hell don't you step on your butts is what I want to know.

D.W.: If it all burnt up—what a sacrifice!

BLONDY: Yeh --the bankers'.

D.W.: There's only one drawback—it's too easy a death for Chambers. [Scowling. ] That Mohawk! He thinks the whole war started between an Indian club and a dumbbell. [Aside to

Pell: ] Don't lose that. We may do a comedy next. Here's the idea in a nutshell: "In Old Kentucky she was born/And had to stand for sneers and scorn,/Until a Boston Yank she wed!/The laugh was then on him instead!"

But that doesn't sound quite right. I'm all mixed up talking with Chambers. Is he still eating?

*Enter Mr. Such.*

SUCH: Sirs, will you speak to Mr. Chambers? He's trying to make me put a gorget and epaulettes on the leading lady!

D.W.: [coldly]: Mr. Pell, get Lossing! And bring me a blackjack.

PELL: What style of blackjack, sire?

D.W.: An Adam! That will hurt Chambers worse than a Chippendale. If we can get rid of that cheap novelist we may make some progress. Why, I haven't shot half-a-million feet yet, and there are ten reels we haven't touched! If I could get rid of Chambers I'd feel comparatively merry. I feel merry at the very thought! Where's Mr. Ashcraft?

*Enter Mr. Ashcraft.*

ASHCRAFT: Sire?

D.W.: Get that manuscript of Mr. Chambers', tear up all except the preface, and send that to Harold Bell Wright to revise. I'll teach him that the Revolutionary War was fought in Kentucky and was not a naval action on the Erie Canal!

*Enter a Waiter from the Restaurant.*

WAITER: Sire!

D.W. [amiably]: Ah, did you bring me my little brown teapot?

WAITER: No, sir. Mr. Chambers has eaten all the eggs and asks for another omelet, and he wants to know could Cap'n Pell go out on the rocks and gather sea-gulls' eggs for his dinner....

D.W.: [enraged ]: Where's my Hepplewhite blackjack!

SUCH: [soothingly]: Be calm, sire. He might have asked for a steak off one of your bears.

D.W.: That's true. Cap'n Pell, rake my untrustworthy sailboat and cruise for sea fowl eggs. Anything to keep that novelist's mouth too busy to talk with. [Exit Cap'n Pell.] Call everybody!

BLONDY: It can't be done, sire.

D.W.: Why not?

BLONDY: All the principals and extras are stuck fast on my new varnished floor in the Woolworth Building.

D.W.: All right! We'll take 'em that way. We may use them somewhere and somehow. [He strides across to the set where the company is stuck fast like flies on flypaper. Announcing in his celebrated resonant voice:] Places! [Aside: ] By heaven, they can't help it, either. [Aloud:] CAMERA! Now, you are to act as though you all were playing the lead with Fox at a thousand per, and were stuck on your jobs. [To Mr. Such.] Find out from Chambers whether there wasn't a building like the Woolworth in Johnstown about 1776. [To Blondy:] Don't let them run the elevators—that isn't historically accurate.... My God! This scene lacks something. Go down to the livery stable....

SUCH: Sire! The floor is sticky and the indiscretions of the horses might. . .

D.W.: No. It's one of those subtle Griffith touches. Bring the horses and let nature take its course!

SUCH: But horses seldom frequent the Woolworth Building.

D.W.: You talk like Chambers! Be a man. Emancipate yourself from a bigoted passion for facts!

PELL's VOICE [from without]: There she blows!

D.W.: What does he mean?

BLONDY: Maybe he means some dame is blowing him to something....

*Enter Cap'n Pell with a harpoon and a flounder impaled.*

PELL: Great God, sire, what a battle I've had with this monster of the deep! Three times he came up and spouted.

D.W.: Where are the sea fowl's eggs?

PELL: The ocean was lashed to a bloody foam! I called all hands to man the spittoon....

D.W.: There's always a crate or two of spot eggs adrift off Orienta Point. Did you salvage any for Chambers?

PELL: . . . And when I drove my harpoon into the flounder he turned on the boat and bit a piece out of the main mast!

D.W. [angrily]: Out of my boat?

BLONDY: Sire, Mr. Walheim sat down on my floor and can't get up. They can hear him in New York and they just telephoned from Columbia University to offer him the chair of modern language.

D.W. [gloomily]: I wish I knew what Chambers is doing. I think he's smoking a cigarette and mentally criticizing my technique. [To Cap'n Pell:] Mr. Pell, if you don't get those eggs we'll have Chambers among us in another half hour. Call your people, Mr. Such.

SUCH: No good; they can't budge.

D.W.: Very well. Make some inserts of those relics that Cap'n Pell discovered at Valley Forge. Put five cameras on the clam. Then get the twig of the tree under which Washington said his prayers. What else did Mr. Pell discover?

SUCH: The brush and comb of Charles the Bald, and sixteen volumes of speeches by William the Silent.

D.W.: We may use them all. Take about a thousand feet. Blondy, you keep brushing the flies off them. [Aside:] Ha! The Griffith touch! [Aloud:] I've been trying to remember what Chambers has to do with this picture, anyway.

SUCH: Absolutely nothing, except in the restaurant.

D.W.: Seems to me he had some sort of job....

SUCH: He wrote the book but you canned it.

D.W.: I should think so! What's the book got to do with the cavalry charge at Bunker Hill! There's no kick in that book! What we need is kick!

BLONDY [morosely]: My men are kicking.

D.W.: And why, pray?

BLONDY: Because Walheim's stuck to their floor and they can't mop it up.

*Enter Cap'n Pell.*

PELL: It's a fearful night at sea. God pity the egg crates on such a . . .

D.W.: Very well. When Chambers comes in try to harpoon him. We've got to get some punch into something. Mr. Pell, will you telephone for seven regiments of regular infantry and a machine gun battalion?

SUCH: Chambers will make unpleasant remarks.

D.W.: I have it on the best authority that machine guns were used at the Battle of Yorktown! Mr. Pell, please get Lossing.

PELL: It's a wild night at sea. I saw seven whales and a dead cat off the pier. I estimate there were 19,000 barrels of Standard Oil in each whale and a pint extra in the cat.



BLONDY: Sire, Mr. Walheim is talking Ancient Egyptian, and all the lady extras have swooned.

D.W.: Very well. Send for Mr. Dean. They're always wanting stills of themselves.

SUCH: Sire, that isn't going to put a kick into the picture.

PELL: I've got a lot of whale stuff we cut out of Down to the Sea. Why not have a whale attack Washington crossing the Delaware?

D.W.: That's all right. We can use that flounder.

BLONDY: They've cooked it in the kitchen and Chambers is eating it.

D.W.: Oh, my God! [Loses his self control, puts the wrong end of his cigarette into his mouth. ] Mr. Such! Get me a pair of shears and tie a handkerchief over my eyes! Where's the film!

ALL: Sire!

D.W.: I don't care! I don't care! I'm going to shut both eyes and cut 50,000 feet out of the first part!

ALL: Hurray! That will put a kick into it! That will put the Griffith touch into it!

*Enter Robert W Chambers.*

CHAMBERS: This movie business is very fatiguing. I feel, naturally enough, the whole weight and responsibility of this picture rests on my shoulders. Of course I get some assistance from D.W. The others do their best. But a creative mind is always a lonely one, and I must try to bear my inevitable intellectual solitude.

*The icy silence is shattered by the chaotic cataclysms of Mr. Walheim. Sets tremble. The patent floor heaves.*

*D.W. seizes a Sheraton blackjack and lays Mr. Chambers low.*

D.W. [inspired]: The Sacrifice! Accept it, Heaven!

*All kneel and sing the Doxology.*

CURTAIN<sup>371</sup>

## Endnotes

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1. Campbell, pp.18-22, 27, 97
2. Dunlop to Tryon County Committee, *Ibid.*, p.98
3. *Ibid.*, p.99
4. *Ibid.*, p.100
5. *Ibid.*, p.100
6. *Ibid.*, p.101
7. *Ibid.*, pp.101-102; Lossing, Vol.2, pp.296-297
8. Graymont, pp. 165-166; Campbell, p. 102
9. Graymont, p. 167
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175
11. McKendry Diary, Campbell, p.252 (1924 edition)
12. Wright, p.209. Several sources call this the Sixth Massachusetts; they are incorrect.
13. Luzader, pp. 56, 73.
14. Clinton Papers, Vol. 3, pp. 591-2 (Livingston to Clinton), 596 (Butler to Clinton), 599-600 (Ten Broeck to Clinton)
15. Campbell, p. 106, Graymont, 177-178
16. Clinton Papers, Vol. 3, pp.701-703 (Ten Broeck to Clinton), 735-737 (Clinton to Ten Broeck); Vol. 4, pp. 20-21 (Beekman, Visscher et al. To Clinton; Bogert to Beekman)
17. McKendry Diary, Campbell, p.252 (1924 edition)
18. Clinton to Washington, Clinton Papers, Vol. 4, pp.167-169
19. Graymont, pp. 178-179
20. Graymont, pp. 180-182
21. Campbell, p. 109; Graymont, p. 185
22. Campbell, p. 108
23. Johnston, Campbell et al. To Hand, Clinton Papers, Vol. 4, pp. 259-261
24. Graymont, p. 186
25. Kelsay, pp. 228-229; Cruikshank, Butler's Rangers, p. 54
26. Cruikshank, Butler's Rangers, pp. 44, 52-53; Memoir, pp. 284-286
27. Graymont, pp. 183-184
28. *Ibid.*, p. 184, 190-191
29. *Ibid.*, pp 21-24, 123, 184
30. *Ibid.*, p. 183; Kelsay, pp. 229-230
31. Cruikshank, Butler's Rangers, pp. 54-55; Memoir, p. 288
32. Cruikshank, Memoir, p. 288
33. Campbell, p. 110; Moore, Campbell et al. To Hand, Clinton Papers, Vol. 4, p.339
34. Kelsay, p. 231
35. Cruikshank, Memoir, p.288
36. Campbell, pp. 111-112
37. Kelsay, pp. 231-232
38. Campbell, pp.110-111
39. Cruikshank, Memoir, pp. 288-289
40. Campbell, p.113
41. Campbell, pp.114-115
42. Campbell, pp. 112-113; Graymont, p. 187; Kelsay, p. 232
43. Campbell, p. 113

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44. Campbell, pp.116-117; Graymont, pp. 188-189
45. Graymont, p.188
46. Whiting to Hand, Clinton Papers, Vol 4, pp.286-287; Cruikshank, Memoir, p. 289
47. Campbell, pp.117-118, Cruikshank, Memoir, pp.289-290
48. Graymont, p.189
49. Butler to Bolton, Documents, pp. 261-263; Cruikshank, Memoir, p.289
50. Campbell, p.115
51. Stember, p.75
52. Campbell, p.119
53. Butler to Schuyler, Cruikshank, Memoir, pp. 289-290
54. Mathews, p.58; Graymont, p. 189
55. Campbell, pp. 177-178
56. Campbell, pp. 120; Clinton Papers, Vol. 4, pp. 289-290 ( Clinton to Jay ), 334-335 ( Yates to Clinton ), 335-337 (Clinton to Yates ) 337-338 ( James Clinton to George Clinton ) 338-340 (Moore, Campbell, et.al.to Hand ) , 363-364 (Yates, Taylor et.al. To Clinton ), 758 (Lush to Fonda)
57. Campbell, pp. 179-180
58. Boatner, pp. 1074-1075
59. Campbell, pp.113-114
60. Boatner, p. 88
61. Campbell, p. 182; Lossing, p.296
62. Kelsay, p.233
63. Kelsay, p.231
64. Cruikshank, Memoir, pp. 291-297
65. Campbell, p.186
66. Campbell, p. 185, 189
67. Matthews, Appendix C
68. Campbell, p 307
69. Graymont, p.252-253
70. Franklin, pp.294-295
71. Dwight, p.130
72. *ibid.*, p.142
73. *ibid.*, p.141
74. Campbell, p.ix
75. *ibid.*, pp. 122-148
76. *ibid.*, pp. 214-235
77. *ibid.*, p. 218
78. *ibid.*, p. 218
79. Graymont, pp.188-189
80. *Daughters of the American Revolution* p. 95
81. Stone, pp. xix-xxii
82. *ibid.*, pp. xiii-xv
83. *ibid.*, pp. 373-387
84. Lossing, pp. 295-296
85. *ibid.*, pp.296-297
86. *ibid.*, p.270
87. *After Lewis and Clark*, p. 9-10.
88. [http://www.amrevonline.org/museum2/index.cgi2?a=document&item\\_id=5268&show1=1&show2=1](http://www.amrevonline.org/museum2/index.cgi2?a=document&item_id=5268&show1=1&show2=1)
89. Kelsay, p. 654
90. <http://rs6.loc.gov/learn/lessons/00/canal/play.html>
91. Simms, *Jephtha History of Schoharie County*, p.xi

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- <sup>92</sup> Simms, Jephtha *Frontiersman of New York* II, p.549
- <sup>93</sup> Cruikshank, E.A. *The Story of Butler's Rangers*
- <sup>94</sup> Cruikshank, E.A. *Memoir of Captain Walter Butler*
- <sup>95</sup> The Centennial Celebration at Cherry Valley pp3-5
- <sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, pp 6-31
- <sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52
- <sup>98</sup> Sawyer, J.L. *Proceedings* p.1
- <sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82
- <sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7- 10
- <sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 21-23
- <sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26
- <sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, pp.26-27
- <sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 28-30; 38-39
- <sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59
- <sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60-61
- <sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, pp.68-80 passim
- <sup>108</sup> Leaning, pp. 26-28
- <sup>109</sup> Sawyer, John, p.2
- <sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, pp23-27
- <sup>111</sup> *Proceedings*, op.cit. p.11
- <sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p.19
- <sup>113</sup> Miller, Jonathan, *Subsequent Performances.*, p. 50-51
- <sup>114</sup> Allen, p.476
- <sup>115</sup> Miller, J. Hillis *Henry Esmond*, pp198-202
- <sup>116</sup> Stater, p. 169-171
- <sup>117</sup> Frederic, Harold *The Mohawk Valley During the Revolution* pp. 171-184
- <sup>118</sup> O'Donnell, p.58
- <sup>119</sup> De Forest, p.xxiv
- <sup>120</sup> Frederic, Harold *In the Valley*
- <sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, pp.79-81
- <sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, pp.83-85
- <sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, pp.423-424
- <sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 341-343
- <sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p.367
- <sup>126</sup> Cooper, p.68
- <sup>127</sup> Kennerly, p.56
- <sup>128</sup> Chambers, Robert W. *Letter to Miss Marshall* n.d.
- <sup>129</sup> With some of the money earned from writing, he was able to restore his ancestral home in the southern foothills of the Adirondacks, ten miles north of the Mohawk Valley, named Broadalbin, after the nearby village. He planted more than 20,000 trees on the 800 acres of his estate. Chambers was an avid sportsman; when the news broke in 1914 about the Battle of the Marne, he remarked to a friend "I whipped that little river almost from end to end with a fishing rod." He bred and cross-bred butterflies, and his butterfly collection lacked but two specimens from completion. As well he collected Japanese China, Chinese object d'art, armor, furniture and books.
- <sup>130</sup> Chambers, Robert W. *Cardigan*, iv
- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4
- <sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p6
- <sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p.19
- <sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* p.21
- <sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p.342
- <sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p.466
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p.468
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p.471
- <sup>139</sup> Chambers, Robert W. *The Maid at Arms* p.60-61
- <sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p.77

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p.309

<sup>144</sup> Chambers, Robert W. *The Reckoning* pp.14-16

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.60-61

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p.102-103

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp 141-143

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 236-237

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p.284 "Lieutenant Boyd" is an officer who will figure prominently in the next novel in the cycle, *The Hidden Children*. A historical figure, a scout captured by the Iroquois and ritually executed, he is drawn from the same sources as Butler, with as little substantial history. Chambers will create as much of Boyd as he did of Butler.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., pp290-291

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., pp315-316

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.341

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., pp 356-357

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p.369

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., pp369-371

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.373

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p.386

<sup>158</sup> Chambers, *The Hidden Children*, pp.141.142

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.147

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.219

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p.259

<sup>162</sup> Slide, pp xiii-xiv

<sup>163</sup> There are two stories in every Hollywood production, the movie story and the money story. The money story is often a more reliable indicator about the actual facts of what happened, certainly more so than anything released or admitted by the producers. Soon after production began, Goldstein said that it would be moved to a studio being built for Continental in Hollywood on Van Ness Avenue.

But there were other indicators. Howard Gaye, one of the leads, told the story afterwards that after a bright start, a rumor arose that they wouldn't be paid that week. Goldstein addressed cast and crew and told them that a mistake had been made and all would be rectified next week. It was not, but the production seemed to be moving along well, and finally the film was finished and the unpaid cast and crew, Gaye among them, decided to wait until the picture's release.

Still unpaid, he sued, and won. The funds still not coming, Gaye had his lawyer file a Writ of Attachment on Goldstein's Twin Six Packard. The car was taken by the police and Gaye waited for his money. Three days later, as he was crossing Hollywood Boulevard, an oncoming car sounded its horn. Gaye stepped back in time to avoid being run down by a chauffeur driving the said attached Twin Six Packard, Goldstein relaxing in the back seat. Gaye called his lawyer; Goldstein had put down a cash bond and got his car back. Gaye decided to cut his loss and gave up. He would have other reasons for doing so, but that is another part of the story. *ibid*, p. xiv

<sup>164</sup> *ibid*, p. xiv

<sup>165</sup> Noah, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182444/>

<sup>166</sup> Slide, p. 30-35

<sup>167</sup> Poe, pp. 569-77

<sup>168</sup> Slide, *op cit*, p. 51

<sup>169</sup> *ibid*., p. 55

<sup>170</sup> <http://www.slate.com/id/1005493> Back at his hotel, the manager informed him that he was being evicted and his possessions kept as security. Word may have reached management that Goldstein was receiving even more attention from the police than show people were expected to get. The precarious state of his finances may have caught up to him, and in more ways than one. By his own account, Goldstein suffered an attack of some kind:

Goldstein was now in a perspiration and he felt deathly sick. He staggered from the room, followed by the detective, who took him roughly by the arm as though he was

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arresting him. In his agony, Goldstein thought of the picture. No, he must not make any disturbance now. The new case was coming up in Judge Kavanaugh's court that day. He would pay and go. All of his belongings had been stolen with his suitcase, suits of clothes, silk shirts, expensive neckties, a watch, etc. He would take up this matter after he won with the picture. In the lobby, everything seemed dark, there was a roaring in his ears. He heard the clerk ask for \$175 and, weakly, he laid the money on the counter. Was he going to die? He did not care. The house detective led him by the arm to the door and set him on the air. He staggered down Michigan Avenue and was taken with a violent fit of vomiting. He went into a doorway and vomited until he thought the end had come. Then, weak and sick, he felt his senses gradually returning. He crossed the street and stood by the lake. The cold wind revived him.

He thought the matter over. He had always been in the habit of putting his letters into his pockets and when they were full, he emptied them into the grip. It had been partly filled with papers and letters. Well, he thought, there is nothing I need be afraid of in those letters, that is certain. But is this a civilized country?

That afternoon, after he left the courthouse, he was walking down a crowded part of Randolph Street, when he was suddenly surrounded by half a dozen men. They pressed close to him in the crowd. A thrill of fear went through him. Was it murder? Suddenly they left and scattered through the crowd. Was he dreaming? He looked at the crowds of people passing him unconcernedly. Then he felt in his pockets. His pockets had been completely cleaned out. Money, keys, everything was gone. He felt for his letters and papers. They were also gone. Only what was in his inside vest pocket, buttoned up, was still there. But he had lost nearly \$200. There was no use in reporting the matter to the police, for he felt that they probably knew all about it, anyway. It was plain, he was outlawed! (Slide, pp62-63)

Was it a string of random events that played on the overwrought consciousness of a man who seems to have had a melodramatic bent even in his calmer moments? Someone now might call it an anxiety attack, but it's hard to believe that sometime in the last year of producing a major moving picture—his first—Goldstein would not have experienced anxiety. His account was written in hindsight, and with all that he was to experience, his seeming paranoia may have been a simple adjustment to actual reality.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pp63-65

<sup>172</sup> After settling the Chicago run, Goldstein went to New York to try to clear up some confusion with his New York partners. What happened there is simply told by the phrase "New York partners." In the business world, partnership is generally regarded as the hiring of theft by one or all signatories, and this was *show* business. In New York Goldstein realized that he was losing control of his movie.

All the time he felt that some unseen power was weaving a net about him. He could not account for the attitude of people towards him, people whose interests lay so widely apart that they could not possibly have any common motive. (Ibid. pp62-63)

This may have been the paranoia of a neurotic young man. It is possible, however, for a man to be paranoid and to have actual enemies. In Goldstein's case, these people do not seem to have been motivated by any personal enmity. Like the inhabitants of a coastal village, whose adjacent shores are suddenly home to a rich vessel wrecked, they helped themselves to the riches placed in their way, without any animosity to the hapless owner of the goods.

Goldstein remained in New York for some weeks, hoping he could retrieve his rights. One night he was having dinner at Rector's, with two of his partners, when he heard a familiar voice. It was an actor he knew from *Intolerance*, who'd worked on that picture as one of the army of assistant directors. He was wearing a foreign military uniform, complete with boots and spurs. He had not enlisted; he was acting in a play and came home in costume to find that his landlady had locked him out of his room for nonpayment of rent. Yet here he was eating at Rector's.

Goldstein did not mention if he had the touch put to him, or if he loaned the man money; if he did, it was more money than Howard Gaye or most of his other actors ever saw from Goldstein. Neither did Goldstein reflect on the shifting nature of reality in show business—a broke actor in a costume eating out at one of New York's finest restaurants, as he himself dined with two of his partners trying to steal something from him. Nor does he mention what he may have been trying to steal from *them*. He treated the matter as

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an anecdote, rather than as an encounter with Elijah. (Ibid. pp63-65)

<sup>173</sup> Weitzel, in Slide, pp230-1

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p.231

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182444/>

<sup>176</sup> *Photoplay*, Slide, p233

<sup>177</sup> Slide, ,p. xxiii

<sup>178</sup> Noah, Timothy, *The Unluckiest Man in Movie History, Part 3* <http://www.slate.com/id/1005644>

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Slide, *op cit.*, p.12

<sup>181</sup> Unlike Elijah. The actor/assistant director Goldstein met dining in Rector's, in the foreign uniform, locked out of his room for non-payment of rent, was Erich Stroheim. He had arrived in America eight years before, a hat maker's son, who added a "von" upon arriving in Hollywood. The year after he could not pay his rent, he was a minor sensation as a player of villainous roles, "the man you love to hate", as he or his publicist called him. He became a director of his own scripts, creating no less than three of the legendary follies of Hollywood history: *Greed*, *Queen Kelly* and *The Wedding March*, weird but wonderful mixtures of that strange Viennese blend of schmaltz and cynicism. All three were vastly ambitious; all three were taken out of his hands and recut into shadows of themselves, leaving bare outlines of their grandeur. When no one would allow him to direct, he subsided into a movie star, into a career that lasted as long he willed it to, living to see his follies acclaimed as shattered works of genius.

<sup>182</sup> Chambers, Robert W. *The Little Red Foot*, p.298

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p.298

<sup>184</sup> Schickel, *D.W. Griffith*, p.248

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, p.486

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.490

<sup>187</sup> Schickel, *Writing in Silence*; p.71

<sup>188</sup> Chambers, Robert W., *America*, p. 214

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p.215

<sup>190</sup> Amazingly, the same love story was used in the 1985 attempt at a film on this topic, *Revolution*; Al Pacino, playing a Mohawk Valley fur trader, loves the daughter of a wealthy New York merchant.

<sup>191</sup> Schickel, *Griffith*, p.603

<sup>192</sup> Wills, pp 54-55

<sup>193</sup> *The Birth of a Nation* aside, his most celebrated reach may have been the intertitle in *Orphans of the Storm*, which identified Georges Danton as "the Abraham Lincoln of France."

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 54-55

<sup>195</sup> Henderson, p.249

<sup>196</sup> Barrymore's long subsequent career in sound was that of a character actor whose presence usually counted for more than the stars billed above him. Hamilton also graduated to character work and worked steadily for the rest of his life. Carol Dempster married a wealthy banker in 1929 and never acted again.

<sup>197</sup> Schickel, *Griffith*, p.490

<sup>198</sup> Streeter, p.3

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, p.16

<sup>200</sup> Waldron, p.26

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16 - 24

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>203</sup> *Sesqui-centennial* , p.2

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

<sup>205</sup> Murdock, Harold *The Nineteenth of April 1775*

<sup>206</sup> Swiggett, p.xv

<sup>207</sup> Howard Swiggett, *Novelist, Die*

<sup>208</sup> Reader's Digest Condensed Books, p.379

<sup>209</sup> Swiggett, p.xv-xvi

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- <sup>210</sup> Ibid., p.xvii  
<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p.81  
<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.40  
<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p.110  
<sup>214</sup> Swiggett, op cit, p.xv  
<sup>215</sup> Cruikshank,, *Memoir of Captain Walter Butler* p.298  
<sup>216</sup> Swiggett, op cit, pp11-12  
<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p.17  
<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p.17  
<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p.104  
<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p.104  
<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p.274  
<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.104-5  
<sup>223</sup> Cruikshank, *Records of Niagara*, pp 61-64  
<sup>224</sup> Swiggett, p.271  
<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p.271  
<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.105  
<sup>227</sup> Dwight, p.142  
<sup>228</sup> Swiggett, p.4  
<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p.33  
<sup>230</sup> Swiggett, op cit, p.150  
<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p.155  
<sup>232</sup> Kelsay, op cit., pp 563-565  
<sup>233</sup> Swiggett op cit., p. 154  
<sup>234</sup> Kelsay, p.654  
<sup>235</sup> Swiggett., pp4-5  
<sup>236</sup> Ibid., pp 155-156  
<sup>237</sup> Frederic, Harold *In The Valley* pp80-81  
<sup>238</sup> Swiggett, ibid., p.33  
<sup>239</sup> ibid., p. xxiii Here I must pause and note the passing of Robert W. Chambers, who died in the December of the year that *War Out of Niagara* was published. He was able to read the generous thanks of his admirer, who give him credit for *suggestions, information, clues, hospitality, sympathy, and the vast lore of Tryon and Indian warfare which he, beyond anyone in America, possesses*, and his absolution of any errors of the author. He was not a great writer, or, when he was in a hurry, even a very good one, but he seems to have been a thoroughly decent fellow.  
<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. x  
<sup>241</sup> Thomas, Evan *Books* May 28, 1933, p.9, quoted in *Book Review Digest* New York: H.W. Wilson Co. 1934, p.923  
<sup>242</sup> *New York Times*, April 9, 1933 p.11, quoted in *Book Review Digest* 1934, p.923-4  
<sup>243</sup> Pound, Arthur, *Saturday Review of Literature*, September 16 1933 10:117, quoted in *Book Review Digest* 1934, p.924  
<sup>244</sup> McKee, pp479-480  
<sup>245</sup> Cruikshank, *Canadian Historical Review* 14:331 September 1933, quoted in *Book Review Digest* 1934, p.923  
<sup>246</sup> Graymont, pp. 337-338  
<sup>247</sup> *Howard Swiggett, Novelist, Dies* New York Times, March 8, 1957 p.25; *Obituary Notes: Howard Swiggett* Publisher's Weekly: 171, March 18, 1957, p. 42  
<sup>248</sup> Wilson., p.42  
<sup>249</sup> Edmonds, *Drums*, p.xi  
<sup>250</sup> <http://home.eznet.net/~dminor/O&E9711.html>  
<sup>251</sup> <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F00E5DE1439F932A35754C0A9669C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=print>  
<sup>252</sup> Kammen, *A Season of Youth*, p.151



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- <sup>253</sup> Ibid, p.357, note 110  
<sup>254</sup> *Edmonds, Walter Dumaux* p.415  
<sup>255</sup> *ibid*, p.415  
<sup>256</sup> *ibid*, p.415  
<sup>257</sup> Edmonds, *A Novelist Takes Stock* p. 75  
<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75  
<sup>259</sup> *Edmonds, Walter Dumaux* p.415  
<sup>260</sup> Wilson, p.260  
<sup>261</sup> Edmonds, *A Novelist Takes Stock*, p.76  
<sup>262</sup> Edmonds, *Drums* p.30  
<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* p.33  
<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* p.57  
<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* p.64  
<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110  
<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130-131  
<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131  
<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141  
<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163  
<sup>271</sup> Edmonds, *A Novelist Takes Stock* p. 77  
<sup>272</sup> Edmonds, *Drums*, p.426  
<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*, p.427  
<sup>274</sup> Benet, Stephen Vincent *Books* August 2, 1936, p.1; quoted in *Book Review Digest*, James, Mertice M. and Brown, Dorothy, eds. New York, H.W. Wilson Co., 1937 p.300  
<sup>275</sup> Edmonds, *Drums*, pp. 370-371  
<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.461-463  
<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii  
<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p.240  
<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p.247  
<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p.262  
<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p.424  
<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p.423  
<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p.424  
<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p.425  
<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p.426  
<sup>286</sup> *ibid.*, p.575  
<sup>287</sup> Kammen, p.218  
<sup>288</sup> Edmonds, *Drums*, p.438  
<sup>289</sup> Kaufman, [http://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34\\_66/61apr1993/61kauffman.html](http://www.crookedlakereview.com/articles/34_66/61apr1993/61kauffman.html)  
<sup>290</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_bestselling\\_novels\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_in\\_the\\_1930s](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bestselling_novels_in_the_United_States_in_the_1930s)  
<sup>291</sup> Preston, John Hyde, *Book Review Digest*, p.300-301  
<sup>292</sup> Nevins, *The Saturday Review*, 14:5 August 1, 1936, p.5  
<sup>293</sup> Countryman, p.90  
<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101  
<sup>295</sup> Edmonds *Drums* p.xiii  
<sup>296</sup> Edmonds, *A Novelist Takes Stock*, p.77  
<sup>297</sup> Edmonds, *In the Hands of the Senecas*  
<sup>298</sup> Edmonds, *Dygartsbush* in *The Saturday Evening Post Treasury*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954 p.360  
<sup>299</sup> Wilson, p.193  
<sup>300</sup> Kaufman, op.cit.  
<sup>301</sup> Kaufman, op.cit.  
<sup>302</sup> O'Connor, pp. 101-103  
<sup>303</sup> McBride, p.706  
<sup>304</sup> *ibid.*, p.300  
<sup>305</sup> *ibid.*, p.298

<sup>306</sup> Anderson, p.45  
<sup>307</sup> McBride p.316  
<sup>308</sup> *My Darling Clementine*, side B 1.22.18-31  
<sup>309</sup> McBride p.318  
<sup>310</sup> *ibid.*, p.325-326  
<sup>311</sup> O'Connor, pp101-103  
<sup>312</sup> Rebello, pp. 149-150  
<sup>313</sup> *ibid.*, p.106  
<sup>314</sup> McBride, p.460-461  
<sup>315</sup> Haralovich, pp63-64  
<sup>316</sup> Higgins, p.1  
<sup>317</sup> Bogdanovich, p.74  
<sup>318</sup> <http://www.irocrafts.com/CatalogueR/Books1.html>  
<sup>319</sup> Anderson, p.110  
<sup>320</sup> Edmonds, *Drum*, p.584  
<sup>321</sup> *ibid.*, p.233  
<sup>322</sup> *Time*, 34:80 Nov. 20, 1939  
<sup>323</sup> Nugent, *The Screen*  
<sup>324</sup> O'Connor, pp114-115  
<sup>325</sup> Countryman, p.102  
<sup>326</sup> *ibid.* p.101  
<sup>327</sup> O'Connor, p.102  
<sup>328</sup> Countryman p.102  
<sup>329</sup> As noted, Claudette Colbert went on in black and white, her career enhanced by another hit. She would not admit to tension on the set between her and Ford, or any misgivings about Technicolor, or location work in the Wasatch, or playing a colonial dame, but Preston Sturges wrote these lines in a scene for her as Gerry in *The Palm Beach Story*:

*John D. Hackensacker III*: The homely virtues are so hard to find these days. A woman who can sew and cook and bake, even if she doesn't have to. And knit ...

*Gerry Jeffers*: ... and weave!

*John D. Hackensacker III*: ... You're joking, but I mean seriously, that is a woman.

*Gerry Jeffers*: Were you going to buy me some breakfast, or would you like me to bake you something right here at the table?

*John D. Hackensacker III*: I like a witty woman, too.

Which sums her up as well as anything.

<sup>330</sup> Benét, *Western Star* Jacket notes  
<sup>331</sup> Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory* p.341  
<sup>332</sup> Benét, *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, p.39  
<sup>333</sup> *ibid.*, p.40  
<sup>334</sup> *ibid.*, pp.43-44  
<sup>335</sup> <http://www.allmovie.com/artist/dan-totheroh-165564/bio>  
<sup>336</sup> Eder, Bruce, commentary for *The Devil and Daniel Webster*  
<sup>337</sup> <http://www.aellea.com/script/devilanddanielwebster.txt>  
<sup>338</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0033532/>  
<sup>339</sup> <http://www.aellea.com/script/devilanddanielwebster.txt>  
<sup>340</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>341</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>342</sup> Benét, *The Author is Pleased* Section X, p.2  
<sup>343</sup> <http://www.criterion.com/asp/release.asp?id=214&eid=326&section=essay>  
<sup>344</sup> Wilson, , pp.352-353  
<sup>345</sup> Morgan, p.434  
<sup>346</sup> Ginsberg, *In a Moonlit Hermit's Cabin*, p.527  
<sup>347</sup> Morgan, op sit, p.462

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- <sup>348</sup> *ibid.*, p.490
- <sup>349</sup> Ginsberg, *Returning to the Country for a Brief Visit* , p. 256
- <sup>350</sup> Collins, accessed at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE3DB1F3CF93BA1575BC0A9649C8B63>
- <sup>351</sup> Carola, Accessed at <http://www.freerepublic.com/forum/a3974848a28a2.htm>
- <sup>352</sup> Usborne. Accessed at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4158/is\\_20000720/ai\\_n14330629](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20000720/ai_n14330629)
- <sup>353</sup> Roberts, Andrew *Hollywood's Racist Lies About Britain and the British* London: The Daily Express June 14 2000
- <sup>354</sup> Flood, p285.
- <sup>355</sup> Antulov, Dragan *Re: THE PATRIOT vs. GLADIATOR* rec.arts.movies.past-films 2001-03-31 10:02:04 PST, 2001-04-01 07:30:04 PST
- <sup>356</sup> Malaparte, Curzio (trans. Cesare Foligno) *Kaputt* New York: New York Review Books, 2005 pp277-278
- <sup>357</sup> [http://www.bookforum.com/archive/sum\\_06/indiana.html](http://www.bookforum.com/archive/sum_06/indiana.html)
- <sup>358</sup> Usbourne, op.cit.
- <sup>359</sup> Carola, op.cit.
- <sup>360</sup> One of the unwritten rules of journalism seems to be *in a strange town? Get a haircut!*
- <sup>361</sup> <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20000628/REVIEWS/6280301/1023>
- <sup>362</sup> As noted, the plot of the 1985 film *Revolution* duplicates the central relationship of *In The Valley*: a lower class fur trader from upstate New York loves a well-off girl far above his station—her name, incredibly, is Daisy.
- <sup>363</sup> Kammen, *A Season of Youth* , p.17
- <sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, p.51
- <sup>365</sup> *ibid.*, pp.341-2
- <sup>366</sup> Murray, p.454
- <sup>367</sup> Kammen, *A Season of Youth* pp.175 & 342 Yet Kammen cites Graymont in his *Colonial New York: A History* (New York: Scribner, 1975, p.408
- <sup>368</sup> Edmonds, *Drums*, p.xvii
- <sup>369</sup> Kammen, *A Season of Youth*, p.149
- <sup>370</sup> Benet, *John Brown's Body* , p.336
- <sup>371</sup> Film Comment, XXI/4, July-Aug 85 p.71